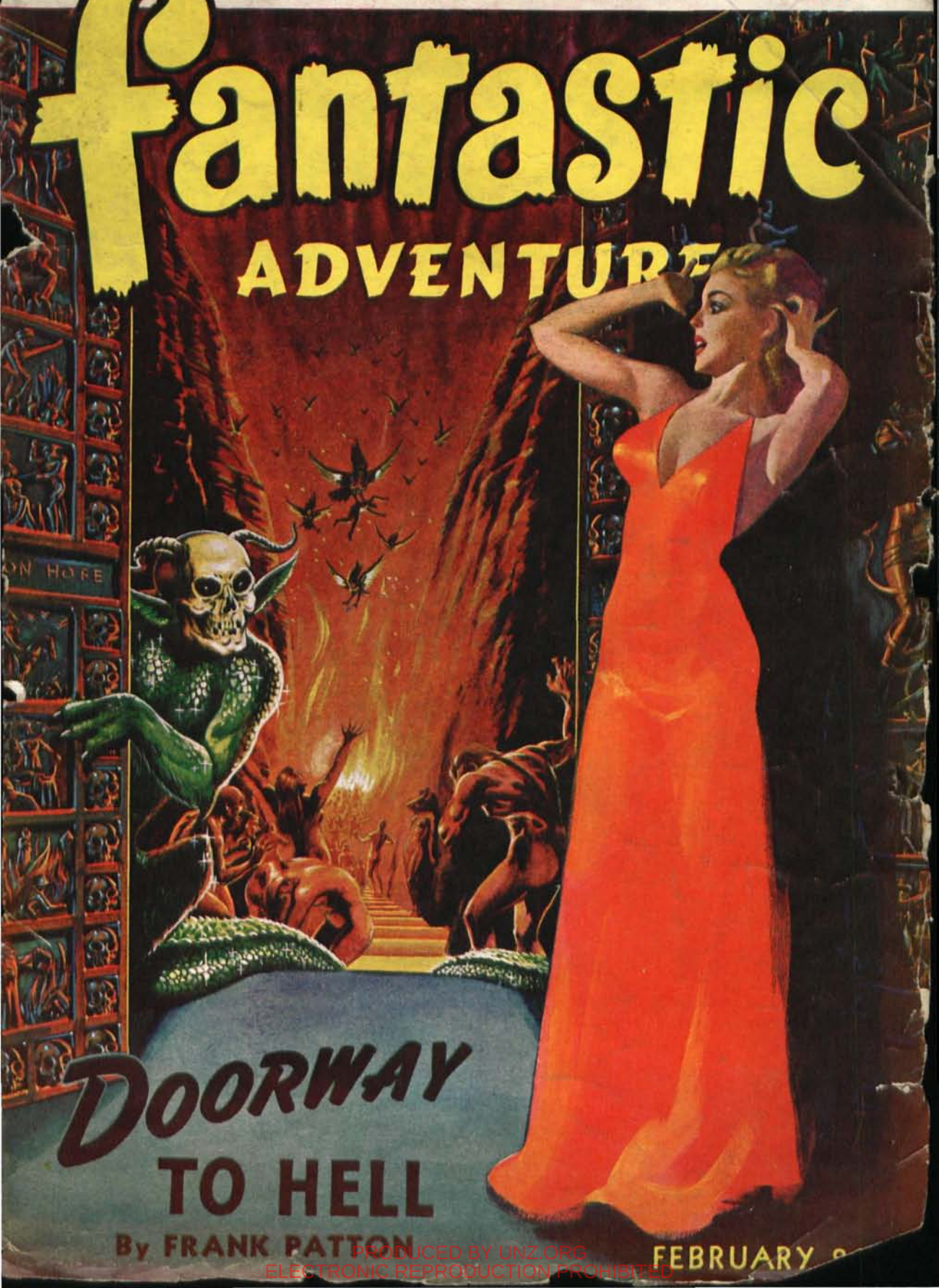
THE LIVING MANIKINS by DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN

fantastic ADVENTURES



DOORWAY TO HELL

By FRANK PATTON

FEBRUARY

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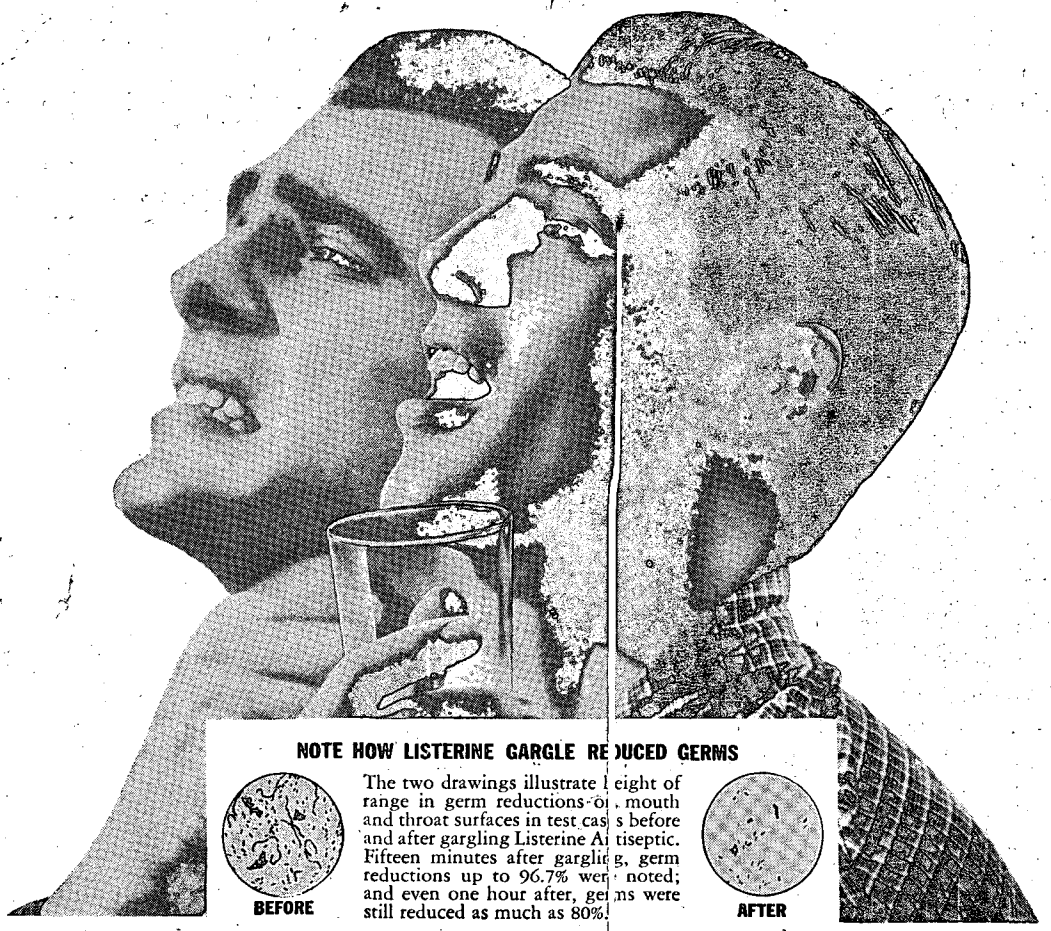

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VOL. 4
NO. 2

Fantastic ADVENTURES

TRADE MARK REGISTERED

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

WE HAVE a rather gala issue this time, and not intentionally, either. But somehow we have two additional stories, eight grand yarns in this month's selection, and we have one new author, and the second appearance of another.

You all remember Dwight V. Swain (who is now editing a newspaper in a little western town). Well, he's back with another Henry Horn story, and we think, very well done.

Then there's Frank Patton with the cover story. Mr. Patton, also of California, is doing his first for FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. In our January issue of *Amazing Stories* he did the cover story, and was so well received that we have given him a new assignment, and this one's a serial, in two parts, the first of which you'll see on this issue's cover. "Doorway To Hell" is really the creation of Robert Fuqua, who painted the cover. The story begins from that. And we think the inspiration certainly made good. Patton's first installment is a fine bit of fantasy. As a reader of *Amazing Stories* remarked, this new author has brought a new freshness to the field. We hope you like this new kind of story-telling. The author, strangely, writes textbooks for a living!

"While you were unconscious from that fall, Professor Purley, we discovered a perfect vacuum, and guess where we found it!"

WE WANT to point out P. F. Costello's "The Lady And The Vampire" in this issue as something we think ought to go in an anthology somewhere. It is a burlesque on vampire stories, but don't let that fool you. It's quite an unusual tale, and Mr. Costello suddenly ranks up with Cabot McGivern, and Williams, for our money. Nice work, Costello.

INCIDENTLY, speaking of Cabot, he has a weird little yarn in this issue too. One of the sort of gems we've come to expect from the typewriter of this modern iconoclast.

AND Williams let himself go this time, for a fantasy that's just a little off the deep end. We wonder what you'll think of it. Let us know, will you?

THEN there's O'Brien, turning a "Topper" with "The Living Manikins." You ought to get a laugh out of this, and out of McGivern's enchantress story, which has some unusual characters.

YOU Burroughs fans had better pick up a copy of the February *Amazing Stories* (on the stands now) containing the first of three novels of Pellucidar. It is one of the big features of another large size issue. Eleven great stories, in which many favorites return. Ralph Milne Farley, Eric Frank Russell, Isaac Asimov, etc. And a new author, Leo A. Schmidt, who is a professor of economics at Marquette University.

AND next month, this magazine will carry the long-awaited final story of Carson of Venus, which will wind up the current series of his adventures on the watery world. Don't miss "War On Venus" by Edgar Rice Burroughs.

ONE of our readers remarks "why don't you continue telling us a little about future issues? We like to know what's coming."

Well, we hate to spoil our surprises, but we admit, sometimes there's something good on hand which you'd like to know about in advance, so as to be sure you don't miss it. So, if you care to listen a moment, here's some brief dope on the March issue.

Ross Rocklynne returns with "The Electrical Butterflies," a most unusual tale indeed, and done in Rocklynne's popular style. It's one of his best.

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Henry Kuttner returns with "Later Than You Think" which is a yarn that certainly lives up to its title. You guessed it, time travel is involved—in a way. And John York Cabot has a story of the type we've come to expect from him. "The Fantastic Twins" is no let-down from his usual excellence. Then there's the final installment of "Doorway to Hell."

THE cover is by St. John illustrating you know what. And Virgil Finlay appears in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES at long last with an illustration for Rocklynne's story.

BUT the real treat to come is Don Wilcox's "Mademoiselle Butterfly" which is a fantasy that really deserves to be called one. It will appear in the April issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, and will be illustrated by Magarian.

THE odd story behind this one is the fact that the illustration was done up as a sample by Magarian. We liked it and bought it. Then we asked Don to do a story based on that illustration, so here we have the first story written around an interior illustration.

IF YOU'LL remember the invitation, still standing, to you readers to come up and visit us any time you happen to be in Chicago, you'd better take notice of our new address. We now are located at 540 North Michigan Avenue, in new, streamlined, and we might say, fantastic offices. In short, they are "dream" offices, and you really ought to see them. Drop in anytime. We'll be glad to show you around.

GOOD news comes from New York. Eando Binder is doing another "Little People" story, but we wish he'd hurry it. We're anxious to learn what became of the tiny ones. Last we heard, they had to move to new quarters.

TO STEP out of fantasy, into cold fact for a moment, we want to mention something that is interesting to every American, whether he or she reads fantasy or not. It's our naval air force. Specifically, we want to present to you our sister magazine, *Flying and Popular Aviation,* now on the stands, with a special, tremendous issue devoted exclusively to U. S. Naval Aviation. The subject of our naval air force as a defense arm has never been more thoroughly covered, nor in more excitingly interesting style. You'll thrill to the magnificent color plates, the authoritative articles, and the special illustrations of all the planes you've been hearing about. Get it now.

THE movies, it seems, are waking up to the fact that fantasy is popular. The newest fantasy film to be presented is "Here Comes Mr. Jordan" which struck us as the sort of thing authors O'Brien and McGivern have been presenting in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. In fact, we might half believe they had a hand in the writing of this picture. The development and plot are so similar to the type of work they produce that it is almost fantastic in itself. Hollywood would do well to continue making these type pictures. We hope they do.

NELSON S. BOND tells us he is bringing back Lancelot Biggs, that comic space character who made such a hit in the past. However, with FANTASTIC ADVENTURES' new and more suitable policy, the odd fellow will appear in our sister magazine, *Amazing Stories.* But don't worry, we'll let you know when he's scheduled, and you won't miss out on his further adventures.

THORNTON AYRE wrote a story of the Golden Amazon for us, but we shot it back to him. He only wrote half a story, and we were so intrigued, that we wanted to know more. So we asked him to add to it, and we hope it'll come back across the ocean with all that suspense relieved. We simply couldn't leave you hanging in the air that way. Hurry it up, Thornton. We're waiting.

JUST to even things up, Manly Wade Wellman was written another "Hok" story, and we're going to steal it from *Amazing Stories,* where the series originally appeared, and give it to you. It seems more suited to FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. And with that bit of pilfering, we'll steal away for another month. So long. *Rap*

"Since my wife went away on a trip I hired this robot maid and she takes care of practically everything!"

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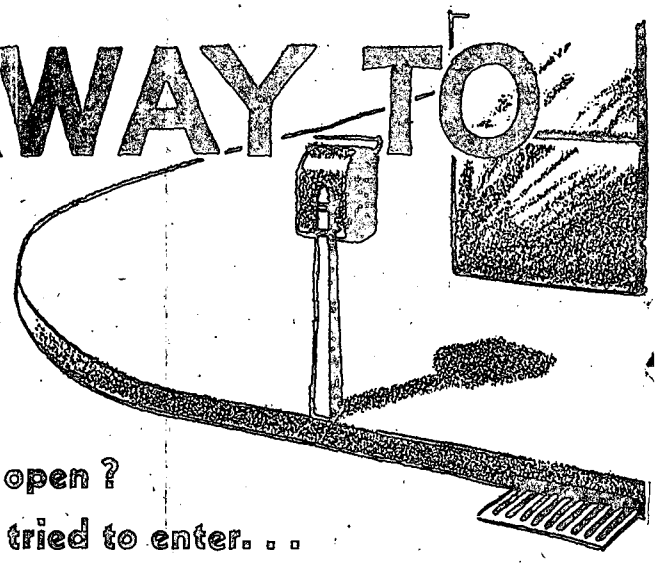
DOORWAY TO



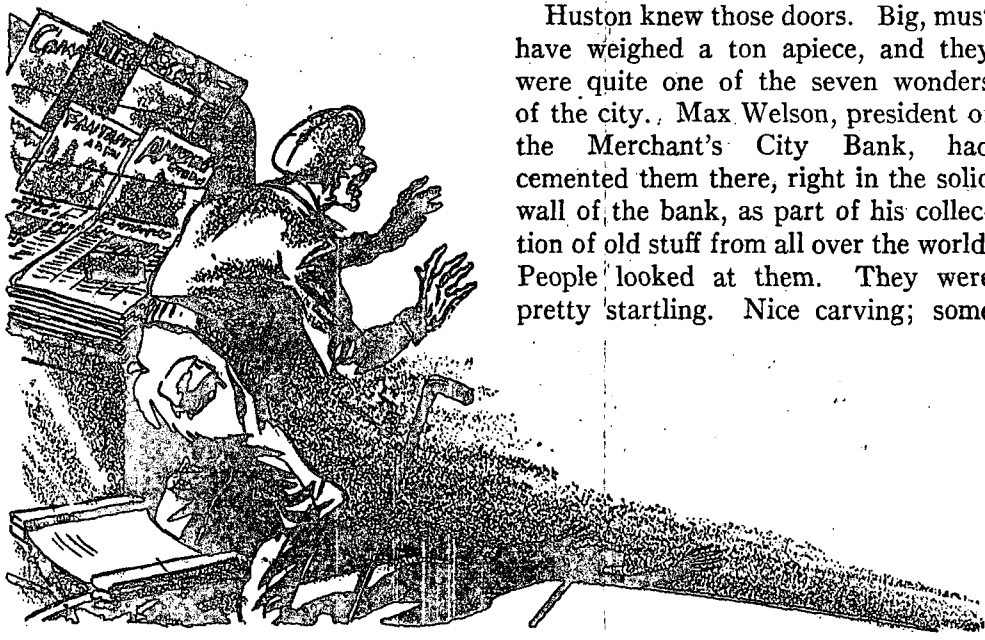
by
Frank Patton

Was this really the door to hell? Did it really open? Huston thought so—and tried to enter. . .

"I SAID, gimme a paper," repeated Arnett Huston patiently, but loudly this second time, because maybe the old guy was hard of hearing.

"Eh?" asked the old newsdealer, casting him a vague glance, then returning his gaze to the other side of the busy street.

"I said . . ." began Huston again, beginning to get a little irritated, " . . . do you wanta sell those papers or don't . . ." His voice trailed off as he too looked across the wide, sunlit street to the opposite sidewalk. There was a man there, and he was acting strangely. He was standing before the huge bronze doors that were cemented into the wall of the Merchant's City Bank looking up at them as though he were looking for a street number.



Huston knew those doors. Big, must have weighed a ton apiece, and they were quite one of the seven wonders of the city. Max Welson, president of the Merchant's City Bank, had cemented them there, right in the solid wall of the bank, as part of his collection of old stuff from all over the world. People looked at them. They were pretty startling. Nice carving; some

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There was a roar of machine-gun shots and the man went down in a riddled heap

experts said it was real art—worth maybe two million bucks, to an artist. Anyway, they stopped people, and that was what Welson wanted. That's why he stuck them in the wall of his bank. It was good business. And where else would he keep them anyway?

Used to be on a famous old church, or something. Lot of superstition attached to them. Funny doors to be on a church, with those words "Abandon Hope, All Ye Who Enter Here" carved into them. Maybe it was some kind of heathen church.

Sure, Huston knew those doors. He'd seen them hundreds of times while beating the district for news for his sheet. Reporting was a hell of a job in this town. But what the devil was the use of digging up news? With the old ducks like this guy selling papers, it was like pulling teeth even to *buy* one, *after* there was news in them.

But that guy across the street—

Huston's rapid thoughts piled up suddenly in a dead end alley. A big sedan pulled slowly around the corner, passed the bank and the guy trying to get in the phony bronze doors. A

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rapid, startling, echoing barrage of submachine gun shots filled the canyon of the street. The guy who was trying to get into the old church doors slumped down, body jerking with a dozen slugs pounding into him. He fell against the door, reached up fumblingly with one bloody hand for the big, carved door knocker, then slid down. He didn't move any more.

The sedan picked up speed, roared down the block. Then a taxi spurted out of an alley. There was a hell of a crash, and the sedan and the taxi piled up. Everybody started running. Huston ran a few steps, looked, saw the traffic cop running over, gun in hand. That end of it was going to be routine. Those guys wouldn't get away. It was this dead guy. He'd have a look-see at him, before anybody messed up—

Huston turned to cross the street. Nobody seemed to have noticed the guy get killed, except the old newsstand dealer, who was standing with a funny scared look in his eyes, still looking at the bronze doors. Everybody else was looking toward the wrecked cars. Huston stopped dead in his tracks. The sun was shining bright and hot on the sidewalk before the old doors, and the blood looked like bits of red flannel torn up and tossed around. But there wasn't any body there.

THERE wasn't any dead man with a dozen tommy-gun slugs in him.

There was just those red blood stains, leading right up to the door and ending.

And that door was embedded in solid cement.

Huston's eyes popped out of his head, almost. He looked wildly around. There just *had* to be a body! Nobody walked away with *that* load of lead in him! And nobody was around to carry him away—if anybody was that foolish.

He gripped the old newsdealer's arm.

"Buddy," he said hoarsely. "That guy was shot. Where'd he go . . .?"

The old man looked plenty scared. His mouth opened, but he didn't say anything. Nothing but:

"I don't know," wildly, "I didn't see . . ."

Huston dropped his hand from the old guy's arm.

"Uncle," he said accusingly. "You was looking right at the guy all the time. You musta seen where he went."

"No!" the old man nearly shrieked. He was white with fear. More fear than a man ought to show just from seeing a guy bumped off. "There's nothing but solid concrete behind those doors . . ."

"Solid concrete . . ." Huston swallowed. "You don't mean he went thr . . ." His lips tightened. After a long look at the newsdealer he snorted, turned on his heel, and walked toward the crowd surrounding the wrecked cars.

"Crazy old coot," he muttered. "Crazy as a bedbug! Solid concrete . . ." He swallowed again.

"I didn't see nothing either," he said defensively. "Nobody got killed. It was a bunch of backfires from the car. I need a drink."

He swiveled suddenly, entered a tavern door beside the sidewalk.

"To hell with covering a lousy smash-up," he mumbled. "Only a taxi anyway. The guy deserves it. All taxis deserve it. Streaking out of an alley that way . . ."

CHAPTER II

No Body—But a Killing!

"McCLINTOCK," warned the Sergeant dangerously, "you'd better lay off that crazy spiel, or lay off

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the booze. It must be booze, because I don't think you are nuts enough to keep on yapping about a killing that didn't happen, or—" he added suspiciously, "what kind of cigarettes you smoking lately?"

The traffic cop flushed, swallowed.

"Maybe I'm going nuts, Sarge. Maybe I need a vacation. But what about them bloodstains?"

The sergeant leaned back, exasperated.

"For your information, Mac, I'm sick and tired of hearing about *them!* Max Welson has been yapping in the Mayor's ear, and consequently people have been yapping in mine, about vandals slinging paint over his phony doors in the side of the bank. *Red paint,* McClintock! And poor grade, too. The handy man had no trouble washing it off right after it was thrown there. If you make one more crack about blood, you'll get that vacation, and without pay. Now get the hell out of here!" Sergeant Gorrity's voice ended on a rising, almost hysterical note. "Cripes, what a job! I wish I was back on the beat! Dumb cops . . ."

Arnett Huston fell in beside McClintock as the traffic officer walked out of the door into the street.

"It was blood, Mac," he said. "Three of us saw that killing; you, me, and the old guy that sells newspapers on the corner. We ain't all nuts. Maybe there ain't a body, but there *was* a killing. And by God, I'm gonna find a body!"

McClintock frowned, his face took on a stubborn look.

"My wife just had a baby. The sarge says I didn't see anybody killed; because nobody was killed. I guess I didn't see any killing. Anyway, I can't afford to think I saw one. So I'm going back and blow my whistle and snarl up traffic."

Huston grinned.

"That leaves just me. The old guy says he didn't see anything either. So, I guess I'll have to go it alone. Right now I'm going up to the hospital and see those mugs who were in the sedan. After all, there *was* a tommy-gun in the car."

McClintock nodded.

"Only thing that saved my face. I booked 'em for carrying weapons without a license. But if I was you, I'd stay out of it. Those guys were members of Shorty Pearson's mob."

"Thanks for the solicitude, Mac, but I got a hunch on this thing—and I'm going to nose around a bit."

He left the troubled traffic officer as they reached the lot where his car was parked. His hand fumbled for his keys in his pocket, came out with several dull, heavy objects. He looked down at the tommy-gun slugs reflectively, then dumped them back in his pocket.

"Three hunks of lead that *ain't* pipe dreams!" he said emphatically. Maybe there ain't a body now, but there *was* one. These things went through one before they plastered against that door that don't open. And I *saw* a guy get killed, even if Mac and the old guy won't admit they did."

He climbed into his car.

"WHY'D you k i l l him?" Huston asked the h e a v i l y bandaged figure on the hospital bed.

"Because he . . . hey, are you crazy?" demanded the man in the bed. "Nobody ain't been killed. Why don't you talk to my mouthpiece? I ain't got nothing to say about the . . . about the accident. Who're you? Who let you in here, anyway?"

"Oh," nodded Huston sagely, "he's been here already, eh?"

"He? Who?"

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"Your 'mouthpiece'," said Huston. "Too bad I missed him."

The bandaged figure struggled up to a sitting position, then groaned and fell back again.

"Damn that taxi!" the gangster groaned. "And damn you too, mister. And get outa here while you're still healthy. You're too damn snoopy."

He reached for the call-bell at the head of his bed.

Huston grinned and turned away.

"Thanks, pal," he tossed back over his shoulder. "I don't know what kind of guardian angels the Pearson mob has working for 'em, but they sure are handy to have around—snatching dead bodies into thin air . . . if they stay there! I think I'll go ring doorbells now. See you later."

He bumped into a nurse.

"Pardon me," he said.

"Young man," she said frigidly, "this is not visiting hours. You will have to leave, unless you have a pass . . ."

"No ma'am," said Huston cheerfully. "I haven't. And now, if I can get into another door as easy as I did this one, everything will be rosy."

"You'll have to leave the hospital," began the nurse hastily.

Huston grinned at her.

"Take it easy, sister," he said. "No more doors *here*. This other door is in a bank. Everybody says it never opens, but I'm not so sure now . . ."

ARNETT HUSTON got down on his knees at the base of the great bronze doors, put his nose close to the sidewalk, and peered intently at the bottom of the door. Gooseflesh rose on the back of his neck, even though the sun was hot on him.

People passing by snickered in amusement.

"Lose something, buddy?" asked one.

"I wish I had," said Huston hoarsely, glaring up at the speaker.

Carefully, face pale, Huston took out his penknife, and dug a clean white envelope out of his pocket. Then he carefully scraped at the tiny crack under the base of the door. There was a dark stain, a single drop of something that looked like red paint, half on the sidewalk, half under the door. Huston could barely get the tiny blade under the door. No chance of that drop of . . . of paint . . . *splashing* there. Would have been some of it on the *side* of the door if it had. Unless the door was *open* when . . . whatever it was . . . dripped there.

Huston could feel the cold sweat breaking out on his forehead.

But in spite of the nameless terror that was creeping up his spine, he remained awkwardly on his knees, carefully scratching up every last bit of that stain he could get out of the crack with his knife. He put it in the envelope, sealed it, wrapped the envelope into a small wad, and placed it with infinite care in his inside coat pocket.

The man who was standing there opened his eyes wide, so that the white of his eyeballs showed all around. Abruptly he walked on. He looked back several times, then walked faster.

"Yeah," whispered Huston at his departing back. "Maybe I *am* crazy. Maybe I *am*. I must be. That envelope in my pocket *must* be empty. There ain't anything in it. There *can't* be . . ."

He got stiffly to his feet and walked into the bank's front door. " . . . unless that door can be opened!" he finished.

HE FOUND Mr. Max Welson very easily. In fact, Mr. Welson was just then on his way out of the bank, a grim look on his face.

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"Mr. Welson?" asked Huston.

"Just one moment, please," said Welson in an irritated tone. "I have to see about some nut outside crawling around on his hands and knees. This vandalism must stop! Probably planting a bomb . . ."

"Wait a minute," said Huston. "I'm the guy . . ."

Max Welson gaped at him.

"You? What . . ."

"I'm from the paper. Wanta write a story about that door."

"You mean a feature article, with publicity?"

"Sure. Pictures of the door, of you —history of the door."

"Come into my office!"

"No," said Huston. "I'd rather have you show me the door, *inside* and out."

"There is no inside," said Welson. "The panels are solidly cemented into the bank wall itself, and the inside is completely sealed. They can't be opened."

"No?" asked Huston uneasily, licking a tongue over unusually dry lips.

"Dynamite wouldn't get them open," said the bank president imperturbably. "They are very valuable. Picked them up in . . ."

"Never mind that part," said Huston. "Show me everything, *inside* and out."

"There is no inside," repeated Welson a trifle angrily.

"I know. Just show me where the inside would be, if there was an inside."

Welson snorted, led the way across the polished marble floor. When he reached a blank wall, he pounded on it with his fist. It was like pounding on Gibraltar, insofar as any hollow sound was concerned.

"Here, sir," announced Welson definitely, "is where the inside would be, if there *were* an inside!"

Huston advanced, ran exploratory hands over the smooth marble surface. He pounded experimentally at several points, but was rewarded only by the smack of flesh on solid substance.

He got down on his knees and, nose close to the floor, looked for a crack. There was none.

"My dear sir," began the bank president in growing annoyance, "have you come to me to write an article about my doors, or are you looking for termites!"

Huston got to his feet, his face pale.

"Nice job of installation," he croaked. "Very nice. Solid as the gold vaults themselves . . ."

Welson beamed.

"Yes, isn't it?" he agreed. "I personally supervised the job. And now, if you will, I'll take you outside and explain the door itself to you. All those carvings on the panels have a definite meaning. For instance, each panel depicts a different sin. Beginning at the top we have anger, and . . ."

Huston followed the bank president out into the street and stood staring at the door while the man talked on. But he wasn't listening. He was looking at the spot where a droplet of . . . of something . . . had dripped yesterday noon, when the door had been *open* for a brief moment; where a dead man had crossed a threshold to an inside that wasn't!

CHAPTER III

Huston Meets a Girl

"HOW many papers you got left?" asked Arnett Huston.

The old newsdealer fumbled under his arm, counting.

"Nine," he said. "Only nine. I'll be sold out in an hour."

"Here's four bits," said Huston, tossing the old man a fifty-cent piece. "I'll take 'em all. And keep the change.

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Now, how about you and me joining up for beans and coffee over to Joe's? I'm kinda hungry. Wanta talk to you, too."

The old man looked nervous.

"I don't know," he began hesitantly. "I . . ."

"It's on me," said Huston, clapping him on the back. "Let's go."

He grabbed the old fellow by the arm and steered him around the corner to Joe's Eats. In a moment they were seated. Huston gave the order, and then looked at the old man.

"What's your name, Uncle?" he began affably.

"Folks call me Petey. But my name's really . . . really Peter Jimpson."

"Yeah? Okay, Petey. That's good enough for me. Mine's Huston. Arnett Huston. I work for the daily blabbermouth here. I'm a reporter."

"Oh," Petey looked interested. "Then you aren't a police officer?"

"Cop? Me? What gave you that idea?"

"The kil . . . accident yesterday. The way you asked questions. And the investigating you've been doing today. It looked very much as though you were a detective."

"Wrong about the detective, Petey," said Huston, "but right about the killing. No use denying it any more, Petey. You know, and I know, that a guy was pumped full of lead yesterday noon. Now, all I wanta find out, is where the body went. And don't be afraid I'll think you're nuts. I think I'm the one who's nuts, and I only want a confirming opinion.

"You talk like a pretty smart man, Petey. Like you had an education. Now let's keep on being smart and stick to the truth. If a guy was killed, we oughta find out who did it, where he is, and bring the killers to justice. They're up in the hospital now, and we can lay our hands on them. But when they get out, and there still ain't a body, they go scot free. That ain't right, is it, Petey?"

"No, Mr. Huston, it isn't," said Jimpson. "But I'm an old man. I think perhaps age is beginning to affect my eyesight, and maybe my brain. I have . . . hallucinations at times. I . . ."

"Hallucinations?"

"That door's embedded in solid concrete," said Jimpson abruptly. "So they *must* be hallucinations!"

"Why don't you *say* it?" asked Huston in exasperation. "The guy that got killed went, or was taken, into that door that don't open!"

Jimpson stared at him steadily from beneath bushy eyebrows, and in his eyes was a gleam that seemed less old than the rest of him.

"Yes," he said finally. "He went in. The door opened, and he toppled inside. Then it closed. And not only *that* man, but a dozen others, men *and* women, in the past six months. I've *seen* them go in!" The old man half-rose from his seat. "Mr. Huston, I've *seen* people go in that door! That's why I say hallucinations. Because people *can't* go in a door that goes nowhere. And I don't believe in ghosts."

He sank back, breathing hard, but there was no feverishness in his eyes; they were gleaming sanely, assuredly. There *was* fear in them. Fear of the unknown. An unknown that he was trying to deny.

"Petey," said Arnett Huston solemnly. "You aren't having hallucinations. That dead man *did* go through that door. A chemist at the police detective bureau told me so this afternoon. He told me some powder I gave him was dried human blood. You and I know where that powder came from.

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It fell under the door when it was open . . ."

Huston paused, swallowed, paled.

"My God, what am I saying?" he gasped.

Petey Jimpson looked at him.

"Something that can't be true, but *is!*" he said. "And tomorrow I'm going to ask to be switched to another newsstand. I can't watch that door any more. I've seen enough!"

BUT Arnett Huston hadn't seen enough. He kept telling himself that, maybe to keep down the pesky lump in his throat that kept bobbing up every time he looked across the shadowy street at the black square that was the bronze door leading to nowhere in the Merchant's City Bank wall. It was nearly one A.M. The last of the downtown theatre crowd was trickling away to an occasional straggler.

"I'll watch that door 'till somebody goes in," said Huston doggedly to himself. "Thirteen people went in already, and where there's that much box-office, there'll be more."

The clicking echo of high heels on the opposite sidewalk caught his attention. Out of the gloom came a feminine figure, and even in the night Huston could see she had lots of the stuff that keeps Hollywood in dutch with the Hays office.

The clicking sound of heels slowed down, stopped, started again, slowed again. The girl walked to the corner, looked at the number of the bank, then started back again. She went down to the opposite corner, looked at the number on the cigar store, then stood, fingers fumbling in her purse.

Huston watched her peer at a letter, under the street light, then tuck it back. Once more her clicking heels sounded, coming back toward the black square that was the phoney door in the bank wall. She stopped before it. It was the only other door in the block. She scanned it all around, looking for a number.

Huston crossed the street.

"Can I help you?" he asked.

The girl had turned at the sound of his approach.

"I'm looking for number 36," she said hastily. "It should be here . . . but this doesn't seem to be it—"

"No," agreed Huston. "If this door was numbered, it *would* be 36, but it isn't a door, really. At least it isn't supposed to be. Anchored in a foot of solid concrete. Maybe you have the wrong street."

"This is King's Highway, isn't it?"

"I've always been under that impression," admitted Huston. "Does that letter in your purse say 36 King's Highway?"

"Yes—but how do you know I've got a letter?"

"Saw you looking at it down at the corner."

"Oh. Well, I suppose it's the wrong street," she said worriedly. "But it was so very important. . ."

"Look," said Huston. "I got an interest in that address myself. At least in this door which is where that address would be, if it was an address. There's been rumors of people disappearing at this address, and I been sorta keeping watch. . ."

"People disappearing!" she gasped. "Oh my!"

"Whaddya mean, 'oh my'?" Huston asked curiously.

"This letter, asking me to come here. It's from a . . . a girl friend . . . who disappeared several months ago. I haven't heard from her until now . . . and apparently she's in serious trouble. She urgently implored me to come to her."

"At this address?" Huston pointed

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up at the carved bronze panels.

"Yes. And now, it's the wrong address and . . ."

"Wouldn't think a girl who wanted someone to come urgently would put down the wrong address, would you?" observed Huston.

"No," the girl said worriedly, and now Huston could see that her face, and especially her eyes, were as beautiful as the rest of her, "but it's wrong, and I don't know what to do. . ."

"You're going to step into Joe's Eats and have a cup of coffee while we discuss this thing," said Huston, taking her firmly by the arm.

She drew back suddenly.

"Let me go," she said sharply.

Huston flashed his press card before her eyes.

"Listen," he said earnestly. "I'm a reporter. I have a hunch that address is the right one. And if you're at all interested in finding that girl friend of yours, we've got to swap stories."

He released her arm and pointed across the street.

"Over there," he said. "Joe's a nice old guy. If he had a beard, he'd look like Santa Claus."

For an instant she looked at him, then she stepped from the curb, her long evening coat swishing about her ankles. It was only then that her formal garb impressed itself on him. Like she'd just come from a ballroom or something. . .

"It's probably very bad coffee," she said.

"LET'S skip all the 'none-of-your-business' preamble and take down our hair without any preliminaries," suggested Huston, reaching for the sugar bowl, then shoving it toward her "You first," he said.

"You mean the sugar?" she asked.

"Both," he said. "The sugar and your story."

She put one lump of sugar in her coffee, stirred it a moment, then looked at him.

"I hardly know where to begin, not because there isn't anything to tell, but there're a lot of things that just aren't for publication. . ."

"None of this is for publication," said Huston. "Newspapers don't print fairy tales."

"Fairy tales?" she asked wonderingly. "What do you mean?"

"That's my story; yours first," reminded Huston.

"Well, I got this letter from Ellen Whitney, she's the girl who disappeared two months ago, if you read the papers. . ."

"I don't," said Huston drily, "unless one of my by-lines is in 'em."

"I got the letter special delivery this evening, just as I was preparing to go to a dance. That's why I'm wearing this evening gown."

She opened her coat and displayed a breathtaking V of white bosom slashing down into a flame of orange satin.

"So, as soon as I could, I left the dance, and came to the number in her letter."

"That door across the street," said Huston, looking out of the window of the little restaurant. Dimly across the deserted avenue he could see the shadowed bronze panels of the mysterious and forbidding door.

"Yes. But there isn't any number there."

Her face took on a tragic look and she sobbed softly.

"Hey!" he said, alarmed. "Don't do that. I just now discover I can't take it—from a girl as pretty as you. If you don't watch out, you'll wash off those eyelashes, and you'll look like hell. . ."

"Th-they're m-my *own!*" she gulped

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down a sob and flashed at him.

"Ah!" said Huston. "That makes a dream come true. And now, while you swallow that coffee, how about making it easier for yourself by letting me read the letter?"

She fumbled in her purse for it, and handed it to him. He took it and opened it hastily.

"*Dear Elaine:*"—he read—"*I am in serious trouble. You must come to me! It is very important to you, too. Because I know where your father is! I've seen him! And I know, now, that he was innocent of the things they said he did. It was John Arkway who was really guilty. He is holding me prisoner here in this awful place, and won't let me go. You must help me. Come to number 36 King's Highway, but don't bring the police. They can't get in here anyway. I can let you in, and they can't keep you here. But if you want to find your father and rescue me, come at once. Ellen Whitney.*"

HUSTON frowned.

"What's it all mean?"

"I hardly know myself," said the girl with a frightened look in her eyes. "But if I can find my father, I'll do anything. Ever since he disappeared, three years ago, I've been hunting for him. Now I'm afraid to find him. . ."

"Afraid?"

"Yes. Because John Arkway is dead! I *know* he's dead. And yet Ellen says it is John Arkway who is holding her a prisoner. Oh, it can't be; she must be mistaken. . ."

"How do you know Arkway is dead?" asked Huston, a queer note in his voice.

"Because I was at his funeral. I saw him in his coffin. And I saw him buried in it!"

At this last outburst, the girl set her coffee cup down so that it spilled over the tablecloth. But she seemed not to notice what she had done. Instead she was staring out of the window with eyes wide with astonishment and shock.

"Ellen!" she gasped. "My God, it's Ellen . . . in the doorway. And she's stark naked!"

"Stark what?" choked Huston, stumbling to his feet, and looking out of the restaurant window.

But Elaine had snatched her coat from the hanger and was darting out of the restaurant door.

Through the window Huston caught a glimpse of a weird red glare from the bank wall across the street.

"Great guns!" his voice was hoarse with something that welled in frightening waves out of his inner being, "it *is* open! The door's open!"

For an instant his feet seemed glued to the floor, then he dashed out into the street. Across the thoroughfare he saw the orange flame of Elaine's dress and the white flash of her bare arms as she threw her cloak over the shoulders of another girl—a girl whom Huston now saw quite clearly was as nude as the day she was born!

The red glare coming from beyond the wide-open doors was almost blinding, and as Huston watched, the nude girl, wrapped now in the black evening cloak, stumbled inside, past a grinning, gargoylish figure that Huston's dazed senses registered as nothing human.

Elaine stood frozen against one open panel of the door, staring down into the red glare in utter horror and disbelief. Her white arms were flung back in terror, and she shrank away, but seemed unable to tear herself from the fascination of the horrid figure that faced her.

Huston felt his sense reeling, then he managed to stumble across the street toward the redly gaping doorway.

"Elaine!" he choked. "My God,

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Elaine, get away from. . ."

He stopped calling, his words frozen on his lips as he saw the girl in the black cloak stumbling down a stairway inside the doorway; and as he watched, saw the cloak smoke, shrivel, burst into flame, and become whitish ashes that vanished before they drifted to her feet, leaving her again nude and apparently unharmed, although in the greatest anguish to judge from the writhing of her red-lighted body.

"Cripes!" gasped Huston, stopped momentarily in his tracks. Then with a gasp of horror he lunged forward again. For Elaine, the girl in the orange evening gown, was stepping inside the door. For a moment she was outlined against the lurid flames that leaped from far down a long stone stairway, then the door began to close!

"No!" yelled Huston. "God, no!"

He hurled himself forward, and crashed solidly against the bronze doors as they slammed shut with a hollow, metallic ring of finality. For an instant Huston tore at the resisting panels, bruising his fists on the cold carvings that adorned their face, then he reeled back, panting and sobbing with unpent emotion.

"It's closed again!" he choked. "Closed! And she's inside. In hell!"

The full import of his last word slammed home on his stunned consciousness as he backed away—and bumped into a human form behind him.

CHAPTER IV

Locked Out of Hell

"HEY, there, Mr. Huston, please," gasped Joe, the restaurant owner. "What for you run out here? Why you no pay for the coffee?"

Huston turned to face the restaurant owner, who was smoothing his ruffled apron from his collision with Huston.

"Joe," he rasped harshly. "Did you see. . . ?"

"Did I see?" Joe's face was blank. "Did I see what? You see something out here?"

Huston grabbed his arm, whirled him toward the coldly closed bronze doors, in the blank wall, and pointed.

"Those doors!" he yelled. "Did you see 'em open?"

Joe pulled back with all his two hundred and forty pounds, and broke Huston's grip on his arm.

"Mr. Huston, you crazy?" he demanded in alarm. "You get hit in the head, no?"

Huston stared at him.

"Listen, Joe," he pleaded. "Tell me you saw those doors open. Tell me you saw the flames down that damned stairway. Tell me you saw that grinning devil standing there with his long, lizard-like tail. And that you saw the girl I was having coffee with go in that door. . ."

His voice faltered away as Joe backed with stumbling steps down the curb, into the street, and back toward his restaurant.

"Take it easy, Mr. Huston," soothed Joe anxiously. "Come back in, and have more coffee. It'll settle the stomach for you, no? You drink too much, Mr. Huston. You got the snakes, no?"

Arnett Huston turned slowly, his face ashen, and looked at the baffling, immovable doors frowning down on him. He looked at the nude carving that represented woman entwined with the entanglements of sin, struggling to free herself from them. He looked at the base of the door—and lunged forward.

With an inarticulate cry he picked up a torn shred of orange satin, clutched it in his fingers and waved it before the astonished and frightened eyes of the restaurant owner.

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"Look at it!" he yelled. "Look at it, Joe, and tell me what color dress that girl was wearing. Wasn't this a piece of her gown?"

Joe stopped his retreat for a moment. looked at the fragment of orange satin, then he nodded dumbly.

"It sure looks like she come from the lady's dress, by gosh," he admitted.

"That's it!" Huston said hoarsely. "It *is* from her dress. And now, you fat coffee pot, tell me you didn't see that door open and that girl go inside!"

Joe turned, his fat face pasty white in the street light, and ran for his restaurant.

"I no see nothing," he gasped back over his shoulder. "You crazy man, Mr. Huston. Goodbye, I go now!"

"SERGEANT, I want you to do me a favor," asked Huston, sitting on the edge of Gorrity's desk.

"Sure, Huston, anything you want, except police pictures, clues, dope on the slot-machine racket, info on the department's progress in the Lefner case, pro and con about this and that. . ."

"Quit the kidding, Gorrity," pleaded Huston. "This is serious. It may mean untangling that series of disappearances that's been reported in the past few months, and some in the past few years. . ."

"Now lissen," warned Gorrity, slapping his big palms flatly on his desk, "don't you start nothing about that disappearing dead man. I've had enough of this business."

"All I want is a look-see at your missing-persons file. Especially the file on Miss Ellen Whitney."

Gorrity looked at him.

"Sure," he growled. "That sounds reasonable enough. In fact, it's the first legitimate request I've had in days. Do you have any special dope on that girl?"

"Maybe," said Huston. "I think I know where I can find her, if I can get in. . ." he paused, shuddered.

Gorrity looked at him curiously.

"Say, are you sick? You got the shakes. . ."

Huston grinned a bit wryly.

"No, not sick. I just thought of a place I was sorta hoping I wouldn't go until I died."

"Blast me!" gasped Gorrity. "A newspaperman with a pricking conscience, and for no reason at all. I don't believe it."

"There're a lot of things you wouldn't believe, until you've seen 'em," said Huston, "and believe me, I've seen a couple lately, and it ain't my conscience either!"

"Huston," declared Gorrity, "you're talking as clear as a newspaper man now. In short, as clear as mud. And I don't make any sense out of you, except you want to see some missing persons records. Well, if it'll get you out of here, come on back to the files, and I'll show you where."

"Right," said Huston. "It's the files I wanta see now, not hell!"

A HALF hour later Huston's fingers were trembling as he scanned a police record which bore the name Ellen Whitney at the top. He took a notebook from his pocket and began writing: *Ellen Whitney, 78 Mercer Street, Chicago. Height 5'2", weight 108, brunette, scar on left hand at wrist.* Huston looked again at the picture that accompanied the report. He saw a lovely oval face, wide, laughing eyes, full lips, rounded chin, perfectly marceled dark hair.

"That's the girl, all right!" he breathed. "Even if I did see slightly more of her than this photo shows!" He swallowed again, hard. Then he

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went on writing. *Disappeared April 11, 1941 from her home. Started for work 8:30 A.M. Not heard from since. Employed by John Arkway, Inc., as private secretary. Was associated with same company for four years. No living relatives. Lived with Miss Elaine Hardwicke. Notify same if found.*

"So that's her full name," muttered Huston. "Elaine Hardwicke, eh? I seem to remember that name. Something about a financial scandal a few years back. . . ."

Huston snapped his notebook shut and strode out of the record room. As he passed Gorrity, he waved a salute of thanks.

"Got what I wanted, Sarge," he said hurriedly. "Maybe more. I gotta dig into the News files for the rest. If I find anything, I'll call on you."

"You mean you got a clew on that girl's whereabouts?" yelled Gorrity. "There's a ten-thousand-dollar reward up for her!"

For an instant Huston halted his headlong rush toward the door.

"What?" he gasped. "Who's offering that kind of dough?"

"Her former employers, John Arkway, Inc. Say, if you really got something there. . . ."

"I wonder," said Huston, "where *in hell* I can spend ten thousand dollars!" And he sprinted down the station steps leaving a very baffled police sergeant staring in his wake.

AT THE parking lot Huston opened the door of his car, then stopped, one foot off the ground. There was a man sitting in the front seat, calmly smoking a cigarette.

"Hello, Huston," the man said. "Whaddya say we take a little ride and have a talk?"

"No time now," snapped Huston. "And who are you, anyway?"

"You got time," the man said imperturbably. "And my name's not important. Just call me Bill."

"Now listen," began Huston angrily, "I'm in a hurry."

"You were seen with a dame last night named Hardwicke," said the man named Bill. "It's about her we wanta talk."

Huston walked around to the other side of the car, climbed in the driver's seat and drove from the lot and down the street.

"Start talking," he said as evenly as he could. "I'm listening."

"Pretty anxious to hear more about her, eh?" asked Bill softly. "Maybe you know where she is now. . .?"

"Maybe," said Huston. "Gone back to Chicago, I think."

"Chicago hell," Bill shot out contemptuously. "Don't try to steer me away from the track. You know as well as I do she moved here over three months ago, before that Whitney dame took it on the lam."

Huston grinned to himself. *That* cleared up one point that had been bothering him. How Ellen Whitney, of Chicago, had known where to reach Elaine Hardwicke here. He shrugged in response to Bill's accusation.

"On the lam?" he asked innocently. "I thought she was kidnaped."

"Aha!" Bill shot out. "You *do* know more about this than the police do. *They* think she just disappeared."

Huston remained silent. Things were beginning to tie up more and more.

"Where's she now?" asked Bill.

"Who?"

"Well, *both* dames."

"Don't know," said Huston casually. "Haven't the slightest idea."

As they talked, he had been turning corners. He drew up in front of the newspaper building.

"Here's where I get out," he in-

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formed Bill. "Got work to do."

Something hard jabbed into his kidney.

"No you don't. You sit right here until you tell me where that Hardwicke dame went!"

Huston looked into Bill's face, drawn tight now with lips thinned in a snarl.

"She went to hell, just like the guy you and your pals bumped off in front of the bank," said Huston. "And you and Shorty Pearson can go to the same place! Now take that gat out of my ribs and get out of this car. I happen to know Shorty ain't killing any newspaper men. He's too smart for that."

Bill looked puzzled, but he was not awed by Huston's manner.

"You mean the dame's dead too!" he gasped.

Huston laughed softly.

"So your mob *did* bump him off, eh? Well, you can tell Shorty that the body's at number 36 King's Highway. And Ellen Whitney and Elaine Hardwicke are there too. Now get outa here and make your report."

Bill's eyes were wide and his face registered blank amazement.

"You goddam fool," he whispered. "I didn't think you'd *tell* me!"

He stepped out of the car, turned on his heel and strode away.

THE back files of the News provided more than enough to set Huston atingle once more. He found the name of Hardwicke easily. It was Peter Hardwicke, of Arkway & Hardwicke Company, Bond Brokers. But the story that was most significant Huston read through to the end:

* * *

SCANDAL BROKER VANISHES

Chicago, January 12, 1938. AP.

Peter Hardwicke, facing prosecution in the Poker Flats bond scandal, has disappeared. The famed broker, now notorious as the "Million-Dollar Poker Player" eluded police yesterday at his home, drove off in his chauffeur's own car, and vanished. Police have no clue to his whereabouts, but it is expected that he will be apprehended within several days, since it is known that he is penniless. Hardwicke's personal accounts and safe deposit boxes have been confiscated, pending investigation.

Hardwicke, accused by his partner in the well-known bond firm of Arkway & Hardwicke Company, manipulated records and appropriated $1,000,000.00 in cash by the sale of bonds for a fictitious power project called Poker Flats. According to John Arkway, the Poker Flats swindle was so cleverly conceived that even he believed it genuine.

Placed on the open market, the chief victims of the gigantic theft are smaller investors and brokers.

* * *

But it was the picture accompanying the story that held Huston's attention. There was no denying the resemblance to Elaine Hardwicke; but Huston could not tear from his mind the further conviction that he had seen that face before.

"Doesn't look like a criminal at all," he said musingly. "More like a kindly old guy who wouldn't lie to save his grandmother from the chair.

In the '39 files he found another reference to Peter Hardwicke.

* * *

WHERE IS PETER HARDWICKE?

Chicago, March 27, 1940. AP.

Police today admitted that they had discontinued the search for the missing Poker Flats broker. When questioned concerning this action, John Arkway, head of the newly formed brokerage firm of John Arkway, Inc., declared that in his opinion Peter Hardwicke

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was no longer alive, possibly a suicide, and that no body had been found. Arkway revealed that Hardwicke had threatened to commit suicide by drowning himself in Lake Michigan with a heavy weight tied to his feet. Police, however, tend to discount this theory, since Hardwicke's motor launch was not used by the swindler in his escape. Is Hardwicke still alive? Perhaps the question will never be answered, the disappearance being recorded among unsolved mysteries in the Chicago police department files.

* * *

Before Arnett Huston's eyes rose the vision of a grim bronze door, ornately and symbolically carved with the sins of mankind.

"Maybe *that's* why John Arkway, Inc., put up such a big reward," he muttered. "Maybe John Arkway *knew* where Peter Hardwicke was!"

It was easy to find the record of John Arkway's death. He had fallen dead of a heart attack on January 12th, 1941, exactly two years from the day of Peter Hardwicke's mysterious disappearance.

Huston licked dry lips as he remembered the letter written by Ellen Whitney.

There was a John Arkway behind that bronze door, and he wasn't dead! Dead people didn't hold live people prisoner—or did they?

Huston decided suddenly that he needed a drink. Ten minutes later he was sitting on a bar stool downing a scotch and soda.

"Ain't it hell?" he remarked to the bartender. "I've always known I'd go there, but I didn't want to. Now I want to, and the door's locked!"

The bartender looked at him blankly, then he grinned.

"Have another shot. They say whiskey's the best way to get there!"

CHAPTER V

A Letter to a Gangster

"I THOUGHT you was going to get yourself transfered," said Huston.

Petey Jimpson rearranged his papers on his stand.

"Changed my mind," he mumbled, avoiding Huston's look.

"How come?"

"This is a good corner," said Jimpson. "And I need the money."

"Good enough reason," admitted Huston. "But what about that door, Ain't it got you scared? It has me."

Jimpson swallowed, then looked defiant.

"Yes I'm scared," he said. "But I'm getting old anyway, and why should a doorway to hell send me running. Looks like I'll have to come back someday anyway."

"How do you know it's a doorway to hell?" Huston asked abruptly.

Petey Jimpson looked at him levelly.

"You wouldn't understand," he said. "And you wouldn't believe it anyway."

"Petey," said Huston slowly. "You seem to me to be a pretty educated man. What you're doing selling papers, I don't know. But you're dead wrong about me not understanding about that door, and what's behind it. You see, Petey, I know it's the door to hell because last night I saw it open, and saw what's behind it. And if fire, the smell of brimstone, big, ugly green-scaled dragon things, flying harpies, and all the rest of it don't look like hell, then I'm blind as a bat. And I saw a girl go in that door. Two girls, in fact. . . ."

Jimpson went pale.

"Two more!" he gasped.

"Lissen, Petey," said Huston suddenly. "I'm buying the rest of your papers again. You and I have things to talk about. When you say 'more', that's

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exactly what I gotta know more about. I want the whole story from you. Everybody you saw go through that door in the last few years, what they look like, and everything. Come on." He grabbed Jimpson's arm and steered him protestingly toward Joe's Eats. When they were seated at a table, looking out at the evening traffic, Huston fixed Jimpson with a stare.

"That other girl you saw go in; was that about three months ago, and was her name Ellen Whitney?"

Petey Jimpson rose to his feet, trembling.

"Mr. Huston," he said. "I can't talk to you any more. This is something I can't talk about. So, if you don't mind, I'm going now."

Huston leaned over, prodded him gently back into his seat.

"So it *was* Ellen Whitney, and you *know* her," he said. "Petey, do you happen to know a girl by the name of Elaine Hardwicke?"

The old newsdealer went a pasty gray.

"E—Elaine!" he gasped. "What are you talking about?"

"I thought so," said Huston. "Well, Petey, the two girls I saw go in that door last night were Ellen Whitney . . . *and your daughter, Elaine Hardwicke!*"

JIMPSON staggered to his feet, trembling violently in every limb.

"No!" he cried wildly. "God, no! Not that! Not my baby. . . ."

"Sit down," said Huston. "You're attracting attention. Get a grip on yourself."

Jimpson stared around at the gaping customers in Joe's Eats, then sank back into his chair. When he spoke his voice was tragedy itself.

"You're right, Huston," he said dully. "I'm Peter Hardwicke. How you knew it, I don't know. But please, please tell me it wasn't my daughter who went in that door!"

"I'm sorry," said Huston gently. "But it was. I'm sure, because I sat here, right at this table, with her last night, and talked to her. She had a letter from Ellen Whitney, asking her to come to the address of that damned door across the street. When she couldn't find it, I went over to ask her what she was looking for. That's how we came to drop in for coffee. I wanted to talk to her just like I want to talk to you.

"While we were talking, the door opened!"

Jimpson clutched the edge of the table, but said nothing. Huston went on.

"Ellen Whitney came out. She was as naked as a baby and your daughter dashed out with her cloak to cover her up. But she went back in the door, and that cloak just burned off her like it was celluloid. Elaine went in after her. By the time I reached the door, it closed in my face."

Jimpson moaned and his head dropped to his arms.

"My little baby, in there!" he choked.

Huston was silent for a moment, then he said gently:

"How about telling me everything you know about this thing?" he asked. "I know quite a bit already; the Poker Flats business, John Arkway's death, and so on. But there are a lot of angles I don't understand. Maybe you can clear it up."

Jimpson's haggard eyes met Huston's.

"You're a clever man, Huston," he said. "You've found out more in a few days than the police of the whole country have in nearly four years. I suppose I ought to start out by saying it was Arkway who engineered the Poker

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Flats swindle, and saddled it on me, but that isn't important right now. I don't care if you believe that or not. The only thing that matters to me now is my daughter, and if it's humanly possible to get her out of that hellish place, I'm going to do it. The next time that door opens. . . ."

"We're both going in!" interrupted Huston.

Jimpson looked at him queerly, then he spoke softly.

"You're the kind of a man my girl ought to have for a husband," he said.

Huston flushed.

"You're all wet, there, Petey," he said, "I only saw her a few min . . ."

"There's only one reason for a man being willing to go to hell itself for a woman," said Petey Jimpson, "and that's because he's in love with her. Don't try to deny it, son. I can see it in your eyes. I've been around, son, and I know a few things. . . ."

"Maybe I do, Petey," said Huston distantly. "Maybe I do!"

JIMPSON went on:

"Three months ago I saw Ellen Whitney go in that door. I didn't realize what was going to happen, or I'd have tried to stop her, even if it meant giving myself up to the police. She was John Arkway's private secretary, and she must have known that I was innocent. Why she let me take the blame, I don't know, unless Arkway had something on her. But she did, and so when I saw her I ducked into the drugstore. From the window—the street was deserted at that moment—I saw the door open, and one of those awful green monsters stood there. It seemed that the creature hypnotized her, and she went in like a wooden puppet on strings, stark terror in her face, but unable to help herself. She didn't even scream, even though her mouth was open as though she was trying to."

Jimpson paused, and his face was gray with horror at the remembrance.

"The man who was shot by the gangsters the other day was dead. He was dragged in by that monster. I thought you had seen it too. . . ."

"What has Shorty Pearson got to do with this whole thing?" interrupted Huston.

"I don't exactly know," said Jimpson. "I do know that he had some connection with John Arkway. I believe that Arkway was mixed up in other things besides bond swindles. I never did understand how he started up that new company—dealt in bonds to the extent of a hundred-million, simply on the million he got from the Poker Flats deal."

"Well," said Huston puzzledly. "It all ties up somehow. Because it was Shorty Pearson's mob who put that guy we saw killed on the spot. I think they pulled the stunt of sending, or inviting, him to that address, then cruised by in the sedan and killed him. Maybe it was just coincidence, maybe it wasn't. The thing that makes me believe it wasn't was the fact that Ellen Whitney said in her letter of appeal to your daughter that it was John Arkway who was holding her prisoner at the address that happens to be that door!"

Jimpson gasped.

"You mean. . . . John Arkway isn't dead?"

Huston frowned.

"No, I don't mean that. He died all right. Even your daughter confirms that. She saw him in his coffin. I have the date of his death—exactly two years from the day you disappeared. . . ."

Huston stopped abruptly, stared at Jimpson.

"*You* . . ." he whispered.

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Jimpson nodded, his face tight.

"Yes," he said quietly. "But if you mean murder, not exactly. I intended to kill him that night, when I visited him. But I never got the chance. He was scared silly when I walked into his bedroom. Thought I was a ghost. . . ."

"And?"

"He had a weak heart. Toppled over when I told him I had come back from hell to kill him. . . ."

Huston leaped to his feet.

"From hell!" he exclaimed. "That's *it!* John Arkway knew about that doorway across the street!"

"What do you mean?" asked Jimpson.

"I mean John Arkway *is* dead! That's why he was so scared when you said you came from hell. He knew of the door, knew of a way to communicate with persons beyond it, knew of a way to use it for his own ends—*but he didn't want to go through it the right way, as a corpse, because that would mean he couldn't come back out!"*

"What are you driving at?" asked Jimpson hoarsely.

"Elaine!' exclaimed Huston. "She isn't dead! She can come back out, just as Ellen Whitney did. And we're going to get her out! We're going to park at that door until it opens, then we're going in after her. And if it don't open, we'll find a way to open it. In fact, I think I *know* a way! *I think I know a way!"*

Petey Jimpson rose to his feet too.

"How?" he asked hoarsely.

"Shorty Pearson," said Huston. "We're going to write him a special delivery letter—right now! Hey, Joe, some writing paper and a pen, quick!"

The restaurant owner came ambling over.

"Writing paper?" he queried. "Sure, Mr. Huston, I got. How about more coffee too?"

"Good idea," said Huston. "I think we're going to need it—to brace up our nerves! What are we standing up for, anyway! Sit down, Petey, and relax."

CHAPTER VI

Shorty Pearson Opens the Door

"IT'S the same stunt Pearson probably pulled on the guy he had wiped out," explained Huston as he wrote. "I'm asking him to come to the address of the door in the bank at one o'clock tonight. Then when he comes, we'll find out if he really knows something about the door, and whether there is a way to open it without killing people."

"I don't think he'll fall for something as simple as that," said Jimpson.

"Yes he will, when he discovers that it's about the body of the guy he had bumped, and the chance that it might not remain hidden."

"I still don't agree," said Jimpson stubbornly. "He'll suspect a trap."

"Not with the name I've signed to the letter," said Huston drily, putting down the pen, folding the paper, and sealing it in an envelope with a flick of his moistened tongue.

"What name is that?"

"John Arkway."

Petey Jimpson gaped, then a slow smile began to spread over his face and he looked years younger.

"Mr. Huston," he said gravely. "Now I know how you got so far on this thing in so short a time. You've got imagination!"

Huston wrote an address on the envelope, then put the pen down.

"I wish I didn't have it," muttered Huston. "I'm afraid it's going to come true!"

"HE CAN'T ignore the letter," insisted Huston. "He can't afford

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to. If he's just a gangster who has had a guy bumped off, he's gotta make sure the body ain't found. And also, he's probably been in a beautiful stew trying to figure out if the killing actually went off on schedule, or if his victim is still running around with whatever dangerous information he had which caused Pearson to want him dead. He's probably thought wrinkles in his skull trying to figure out what became of the body.

"But, if, on the other hand, he knows something about the door, and really is John Arkway's right hand man—or was—he can't afford to stay away, when the letter comes from the door, and from a man who's been dead a year.

"Every way I look at it, Shorty Pearson will show up at one o'clock. I happen to know he's looking for Ellen Whitney and your daughter too."

"You didn't tell me that!" said Jimpson, startled. The old man gripped Huston's arm in the darkness of the drugstore doorway.

"I forgot you didn't know," said Huston. But this afternoon one of Pearson's men tried to question me as to her whereabouts. I told him she was in hell, just like the guy they bumped, and I gave him the address. When Shorty ties that up with the letter, a team of horses couldn't keep him away from the door."

"I wonder what he wants with Elaine," muttered Jimpson uneasily.

"I don't know. There's a couple things I don't know yet. First, who the guy was that was killed? Why was he killed? What did he have to do with John Arkway, Ellen Whitney, yourself —if anything? What's Shorty Pearson working on now that involves the Arkway interests? Does . . ."

Huston broke off suddenly, pointed down the street. A car was coming along slowly, going slower as it neared the bank and the bronze doors.

"Look!" he whispered tensely. "Ten to one that's Shorty Pearson!"

"I think you're right," said Jimpson in a strained voice. His old body was trembling now. But it didn't seem to be with fear. It was more with eagerness. Huston stared at him a few seconds strangely. Funny old guy, this former big-shot bond broker; had a lot of guts.

"Now I know what I forgot," said Huston regretfully.

"What?"

"I haven't got so much as a Buck Rogers toy pistol to fight with, and if my eyes don't deceive me, Shorty Pearson isn't alone in that hack! He's got at least three rod-men with him!"

"That's all right," said Jimpson strangely. "I think I have a plan . . ."

"Lissen, Pop," said Huston. "These guys aren't exactly desirable playmates. I ain't gonna let you fool around with them. What we want is to just get that door open, not to let us in as dead meat, but alive."

"All I want is to get in," said Jimpson hoarsely. "But you don't need to worry. They won't kill me."

The car cruised past them, going slowly. It went on down the block, turned the corner, vanished.

"They didn't stop!" said Jimpson tragically.

"Not Pearson," said Huston. "He's too cautious. He'll drive around two or three times, casing the neighborhood, before he stops. Just you wait . . ."

HUSTON was right. In a few moments the car reappeared, still going slowly. Once more it went past, then, at the corner, it stopped. Three men got out. One of them walked across the street, lounged in a shadow across from Joe's Eats, from which a light streamed into the darkened street

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to emphasize the darkness where he hid. Another remained on the corner. The car wheeled around once more and vanished.

The third figure walked slowly up the street, toward the bronze doors.

"It's Pearson!" whispered Huston. "He's the runt. It's him all right!" He looked down the street to where the two gunmen stood watchfully on guard, waiting. He frowned.

"This is awkward. I didn't expect Pearson to come with an army. Seemed to me he wouldn't want too many knowing about the door—if he *does* know anything about it."

"Perhaps you underestimate the importance of his operations concerning the door," said Jimpson in a low voice. "Perhaps it isn't such a secret as you assume."

Both of them fell silent as the short gangster walked slowly up to the door, looked at it a moment, peered up and down the street, then leaned casually against one corner of it and waited.

"What the hell?" said Huston puzzledly. "He acts as if he didn't know what it was all about."

"Wait," Jimpson said. "What's he doing?"

Pearson was reaching into his pocket. He pulled something out, something tiny, which he stuck in his mouth. Across the silence came a thin, piping whistle, so high in the scale as to be almost inaudible. It was like the singing of steam in a teakettle.

"I don't get it," said Huston. "Some sort of signal?"

They waited many more minutes while the tableau remained unchanged.

"This is getting to be very unfunny," said Huston. "We're all here, and nothing's coming off. If Pearson knows how to open that door, he isn't trying to. And the way he stands there, as nonchalant as you please, it doesn't look very much like he realizes he's leaning on a door that leads to hell!"

Jimpson laid a hand on Huston's arm.

"I'm going over there and talk to him," he said.

"No!" whispered Huston. "Are you crazy?"

"Not at all. I told you I have a plan."

Before Huston could prevent, the old man stepped casually from the dark doorway, walked to the curb, stood there a moment, then, as Huston saw all three gangsters hunch forward oddly, tensely, surprisedly, he stepped into the street and crossed it.

A cleat in his shoe rang on the now unused street car tracks. Then he stepped up onto the opposite sidewalk and walked toward Pearson. Huston heard his voice clearly.

"Hello, Mr. Pearson," said Jimpson.

"Who're you?" asked Shorty Pearson savagely, lowly, one hand in his pocket. The teakettle whistle was silent now. He had removed it from his lips as Jimpson crossed the street.

"That doesn't really matter, Mr. Pearson," returned Jimpson. "John Arkway sent for me. Told me to be here at one o'clock. I've been waiting for him, but he hasn't come. For a while I didn't recognize you, but then, when I did, I realize that we might both be here on the same mission."

"What mission," said Pearson in an ugly tone. "I ain't here on no mission, and my name ain't Pearson. What'samatter with you, old man? Too much to drink?"

BOTH Jimpson's hands were in his coat pockets. He was shivering slightly. Huston, hiding in the dark, realized that the night was a bit chill, and the old man's clothing hadn't been too adequate.

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"You lie, Pearson," said Jimpson quietly. "I know you. And I know John Arkway sent for you. And I know John Arkway is dead. I also know he's behind that door you're leaning on. And one more thing I know, Shorty Pearson, is . . . this—"

Jimpson's hand whipped from his pocket with incredible speed for an old man, gripping a gleaming automatic.

"—you're going to *open* the door!" finished Jimpson, and the automatic barked sharply.

Stunned by the suddenness of his action, Huston saw Pearson sag, saw a round black blot appear in his forehead, saw Jimpson leap into the shadow of the bronze doors, back against them, gun held ready.

Down at the corner the gunman on guard there came racing forward, but a shot from Jimpson's gun caught him in the arm, spun him around, and he kept on running—around the corner and to safety.

A shot spanged against the bronze door from the direction of Joe's Eats. Only then did Shorty Pearson's body tumble to the sidewalk. The shooting from the second gangman stopped. Huston grinned as he realized the fellow probably thought he'd hit his own boss.

Jimpson's voice came, apparently addressing no one, but Huston knew it was meant for him.

"The door's opening. I'm going in. Don't try to follow. I will let you know when I need you, if I need you . . ."

The street suddenly glowed reddishly. In the distance came the eerie howl of a squad-car siren. There came the sound of footsteps from the direction of Joe's Eats. Around the corner came Pearson's car. The gangman running from his hiding place leaped in, and Huston heard his shout.

"Get going, Mike, the boss is dead. We gotta get out of here!"

There was panic in that voice—and more! Terror! Stark, sheer terror, and it wasn't fear of the squad-car wailing down the steet. It was because of the door. It was the same terror that was gripping Huston to momentary inaction. The door to hell was open! A red glare filled the street, and outlined against its source was Petey Jimpson. He was dragging the corpse of Shorty Pearson awkwardly over the threshold —and his clothing was beginning to smoke and shred from him in flaming gouts of disintegration.

Then Huston churned into action. He ran straight for the door, fists clenched, head down.

"Hell or not, Petey," he yelled. "I'm coming in!"

Then his toe caught on the same car rail on which Jimpson's heel cleat had rung a few moments ago, and he went headlong. As he scrambled dazedly to his feet the red glare died, and the siren of the squad-car rose to a hellish shriek and came to a moaning stop beside him.

"What's going on here?" came a voice, McClintock's voice.

The officer scrambled from the car and peered into Huston's face.

"You!" he gasped. "What's coming off?"

Huston pointed toward the door, reeling dizzily.

"Shorty Pearson!" he gasped. "Shot dead, there on the sidewalk . . ."

He stopped in horror and stared.

The door was closed. Shorty Pearson's body and Petey Jimpson were gone. And except for the muted purr of the squad-car motor, the street was as silent as a tomb.

Then from Joe's Eats an indignant voice came.

"Hey, what's all the shoota? Why for you make the commosh?"

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Huston gripped McClintock's arm.

"You hear?" he demanded. "He heard shooting! And I haven't got a gun. And damn you, Mac, if you say that isn't blood there on the walk this time, I'll eat the Blarney Stone for breakfast!"

McClintock groaned.

"Holy Mother, another one! And I got transfered from the traffic division just to get away from this damned business!"

CHAPTER VII

The Teakettle Whistle

"WHY did I ever have ambition in this department?" raved Sergeant Gorrity. "Why wasn't I satisfied to lean against a lamppost out in the sticks? Why didn't I stick to swinging a nightstick and eating Tony's apples? So it *is* blood, and this time no janitor washed it away, and the chemist's scooped it up in buckets. So what? Where's a body? Who was killed? Who killed him? Whom do I arrest? Whom do we prosecute when we *do* arrest? No *corpus delicti*, you dopes! Do you get that, no *corpus delicti!*"

Gorrity rose to his feet and glared at McClintock and Huston who stood before him.

"Just because you're a newspaperman, Huston, and you've gotta have stories for headlines to keep your job, you don't have to go around slopping human blood on the sidewalk, and hypnotizing my patrolmen into seeing ghosts. This has gotta stop . . ."

"But Sarge," interposed McClintock meekly, "the chemist says it *is* human blood."

"Yeah," said Huston. "*Human!* Where do you think I get that kind of blood to slop around—do my wrists look slashed?"

"It's better than believing you two madmen!" retorted Gorrity. "Trying to tell me that confounded door in the side of the bank opened and swallowed up two dead men. We've gone over that bank wall with every instrument known to science, and it *don't* open. It *can't* open. And if it did open, it wouldn't go anywhere but *inside* the bank, and there ain't any corpses in the bank!"

"I didn't ask you to believe me," said Huston. "I was just the innocent victim of circumstances. I happened to be passing by, amusing myself blowing my whistle, and things happen. Can I help it if Mac here insists I come in and tell you what I saw? And now, if you guys have things all settled, I'd like to have my belongings back."

"Your belongings?"

"Yes. My little silver whistle; the one the detectives found when they scooped up the blood. In the excitement I dropped it there. It has nothing to do with the murders, and it's my hobby."

"Your hobby?"

"Sure. Music. I'm gonna play in a band some day."

Sergeant Gorrity looked as though he were going to explode. He opened his desk drawer and produced the tiny silver whistle and thrust it at Huston.

"Take it, goddam it, and get the hell out of here!" he screamed frantically. "No," he backtracked, "*play* that thing first. I wanta hear your musical accomplishment before I consign your memory to limbo. 'Cause when you leave here, Huston, don't come back. To hell with your newspaper. We don't want any publicity any more. Nor any pictures. Nor any ghosts. Nor any doors that open out of solid concrete."

He stopped as Huston stuck the whistle in his mouth and blew on it. A thin, high, reedy whistle, oddly like

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the simmering of a teakettle on an open hearth, keened through the police station. Gorrity stared. His eyes opened wide. With a solid smack, the seat of his pants connected with his desk chair. He sat there flabbergasted.

"A teakettle!" he gasped. "A blooming imitator. Imitating a teakettle! Oh my sacred aunt!" He cocked his feet up on the desk and relaxed. "Go away," he moaned. "Lemme sleep. The whole world's gone nuts. I'm the only sane man left. No . . ." He plopped his feet once more to the floor as Huston removed the whistle from his mouth and put it in his pocket. "Mac, get a squad and round up every member of the Pearson mob you can find. Slap 'em in jail on suspicion of inciting to riot in front of Joe's Eats. Joe Fantino has signed a complaint, and by jeez, I'm gonna use it. *Somebody's* gonna explain that blood."

"HELLO, nurse," said Huston sweetly. "If I show you my pass, can I go up and see my friends on the third floor?" He presented a white card marked 'special visitor'.

"Certainly," said the nurse frigidly. "But don't stay too long. This is very irregular, and I will expect you to leave when your fifteen minutes are up."

Huston started up the stairway, and as he walked up, his smile faded. It became a grim look that made his real haggardness suddenly apparent. He was dog tired, but he couldn't stop now.

He entered the room where the injured gangsters lay.

"Hello, boys," he said. He sat down beside the bed of the much be-bandaged one.

"What the hell you doing here again?" growled the gangman, reaching for the call button.

"No," said Huston. "Don't ring. I got a pass. I can stay fifteen minutes."

"I don't give a damn," the gangster said in exasperated tones. "I don't want company."

"I just wanted to tell you about Shorty being dead," said Huston casually.

The injured man sat bolt upright in his bed.

"What!"

"Yeah. Got killed last night in front of number 36 King's Highway."

"The same place . . ." began the patient, then ended on a gasp.

"Yes. That makes two wiped out there, don't it?" observed Huston. "Who was the first one? One of John Arkway's men, eh?"

"I don't know what you're talking about?" snarled the gangster.

"Okay, Arthur," said Huston, glancing at the chart at the foot of the bed. "I don't care much. They'll identify him at the morgue sooner or later. The important part is the slugs in him match the tommy that was found in your car, and your fingerprints are all over the grip. The guy's name ain't important, Arthur. You killed a guy and you'll go to the chair for it. That ain't what I came here for, though. Not to see you burn. I thought maybe I could do you a favor, and save you from that delectable experience."

THE gangster's face was as white as his sheets now, and he had crouched back on the pillow, trembling.

"I ain't saying nothing," he insisted desperately. "You're just trying to find out something."

"Shorty Pearson is dead," Huston remarked. "I don't think the D.A. will try to prove you were acting under his orders. Wouldn't be any point in that. Would save you from the chair, and the D.A. would like a few tidbits for the hot seat to save his reputation, which isn't

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too good for the next election. Right now, I'm the only guy interested in proving the real truth . . ."

"I don't get you," said the gangster.

"Motive," said Huston airily. "There's gotta be a motive. Now if I knew who the guy was you bumped and why Shorty wanted him bumped, it'd give the whole crazy thing a motive, and pin the real rap on a man who's already dead. It'd save your hide . . ."

"Well," said the gangman, frowning. "I don't know what good it would do, but it can't do no harm to tell you, because if I wanta deny it later, it's just your word against mine."

"Correct," said Huston. "It's just off the record."

The gangster glanced at his companion in the opposite bed, who had remained silent, but watchful, then nodded.

"Okay," he said, lowering his voice. "The guy was Harvey Anderson. "He's Ellen Whitney's husband, if you know who she is, and maybe you do, if you knew John Arkway. Used to be his secretary. He left her his whole fortune when he died, and Anderson glommed onto the whole thing. With him out of the way, the Whitney girl would get it all—and, I don't know just how, that would give Shorty a chance to get the whole kaboodle."

"Holy smoke!" said Huston.

"And that's all I know," said the gangster. "But who killed Shorty?"

Huston put his hand in his pocket and pulled out the silver whistle. He put it thoughtfully in his mouth and began to blow on it. The singing teakettle whistle wafted eerily through the room. The gangster sat up, staring.

"Say, that's Shorty's good luck whistle!" he exclaimed. "Where'd you get it?"

"Off his corpse," said Huston. "Is that all it is, a good luck piece?"

"Yeah," said the gangster, puzzled. "I always wondered why he thought that two-bit piece of tin was lucky. Not even a good whistle. Don't hardly blow loud enough to hear it, and every note sour as hell . . ."

Huston rose to his feet, tucked the whistle back in his pocket.

"Well, I gotta be going," he said, "my fifteen minutes are up."

"Wait. Who killed Shorty?"

"One of his gorillas," said Huston cheerfully. "By mistake!"

HUSTON walked from the hospital thinking deeply.

"That puts things even more in a mess," he said. "What a tangle! I get one question answered and another pops up. Looks like this Whitney girl isn't as innocent as some people might believe. First, she was mixed up with Arkway on the Poker Flats deal, and second, she was secretly married to this Anderson guy. Next, she was pretty familiar with Arkway, or he wouldn't have left her a hundred million bucks. But where in hell does Shorty Pearson come in on *that* deal? How can he get his hooks on that dough by killing Anderson?

"Anderson, it seems, rode roughshod over his wife, Ellen Whitney, and took all her inheritance from her. Looks like she couldn't kick, either, because of who gave it to her, and why. Anderson had her there."

Huston shook his head bewilderedly.

"The whole answer to the mess seems to be in a place called hell, behind a door carved with sins on the outside, and mounted in concrete inside. Somehow I gotta get that door open again, and get inside."

Huston pulled the dead gang leader's whistle from his pocket and placed it between his lips. He blew on it reflectively, his brow furrowed in

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thought.

In a moment the uncanny sound of the whistle got on his nerves and he thrust it angrily back into his pocket.

"But how!" he burst out. "*How* am I gonna get that door open . . . *without shooting someone!*"

CHAPTER VIII

The Key to the Door

"IT'S true!" burst out Sergeant Gorrity. "Shorty Pearson *is* missing. We've rounded up most of his gang, but all insist that Pearson isn't around. Close mouthed bunch if I ever saw one. One wounded one, though."

"Maybe they just don't know where he is," said Huston. "But there are two of them, no—three, who know. And if I can look 'em over, maybe I can point 'em out."

"Sure," said Gorrity eagerly. "You mean you can identify more of the boys who did all the shooting in front of the bank last night? Boy, if you can, I'll kiss you!"

"Not necessary," said Huston drily. "But let's have a look at them."

Gorrity led him to the cell block and Huston paced along, peering at each occupant as he passed. He nodded at a bandaged arm. Suddenly he stopped.

"Bill," he said through the bars, "last night you drove past the Merchant's City Bank, went around the block, drove past again. Then you got out at the corner, and crossed over to the side of the street opposite Joe's Eats, while Shorty Pearson and two more of his mugs went in other ways. Shorty walked on down to those phoney bronze doors in the side of the bank, and leaned against 'em, waiting for somebody. He took out his lucky whistle and began to blow on it.

"Then you stood in the shadows, drew a bead on Shorty, and plugged him through the heart." Huston dug a lead pellet from his coat pocket. "This slug is the one that killed Shorty. It matches the slugs fired from your own gun, Bill. Too bad you didn't think to look in the doorway of the drugstore, where I was standing and saw the whole thing, Bill . . .

"Sergeant Gorrity, there's your man, the killer of Shorty Pearson—"

"You lie!" yelled the gangster, aghast. "I didn't shoot at Shorty. I shot at the old guy. It was him . . ."

Bill stopped abruptly.

"So you *did* shoot!" said Huston softly. "Now we *know* you killed Shorty. Gorrity, that's all, I guess. I'll be around for the electrication . . ." Huston waved a hand airily and began to walk away.

Sergeant Gorrity was the picture of amazement.

"What the hell . . ." he gasped, then stopped at a covert wink from Huston's eye. But it was unnecessary. Behind Huston the gangster known as Bill was raging.

"Damn you, Huston, I'll get you for this, you dirty, lying skunk. Anything to get a story for your yellow rag, eh? Well, what about the slug the old newspaper guy put into Shorty's head, eh? If you was in that drugstore doorway, then you was a party to the killing, because the old guy came out of that doorway too! I heard him tell Shorty who sent for him, and then he pulled a gun and plugged him dead center. . . ."

Bill stopped breathlessly. Then he went on, glaring at Gorrity.

"Ask him about *that!* Then you'll have the real goods on him. That slug ain't from my gun, and the test-tube coppers can prove it. I don't know what his game is, but it's as phoney as they make 'em!"

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"Just a minute, Bill," said Huston imperturbably. "Just a few more things. You and Shorty kidnaped Ellen Whitney. You were looking for Elaine Hardwicke too, for the same reason. That's why you were so anxious to find out from me that day where she was. And you killed Ellen Whitney's husband in front of the doors in the bank wall. And you *know* the body is inside that door! You also know that Ellen Whitney and Elaine Hardwicke are there too! Bill, when you talk about getting the goods on someone, you'd better cover up your own head. You're in dutch for about everything in the books."

THE gangster known as Bill was staring openmouthed at Huston, and in his face was a growing fright, almost verging on terror.

"H-how do you know all that?" he gasped. "You ain't human . . ."

"Neither are some of the things beyond that door," said Huston softly. "And when I open that door tonight, I'm going to find out everything I don't know yet. Enough to send you to the chair a dozen times over."

"You don't know how to open that door," whispered Bill hoarsely.

"Don't I!" said Huston triumphantly. "You think I don't know what Pearson was doing leaning against it. Well, I'm going to do that same thing tonight, and I'm going in."

"You're going *in?*" asked Bill, an incredulous light in his eyes that grew into a sudden confidence. "Go ahead," he said abruptly. "Once I called you a goddam fool. I still say it. Go ahead in, if you can blow hard enough!"

The gangster turned and hurled himself on his bunk and refused to talk further. Huston stared at him a moment, then walked out with Gorrity.

Outside, Gorrity sank back into his seat with a low moan.

"For cripe's sake, Huston, what's this all about? You were talking as nutty as a fruitcake. You know damn well that slug ain't from Pearson's body. It ain't from no body at all. We ain't *got* a body. And all that guff about that damned door . . ."

"Listen, Gorrity," said Huston, "you figure that all out for yourself. You admit that Bill admitted a dozen things while we were talking. I surprised him into it. But he also said a few things that puzzled me more than ever. And the one thing I wanted to know, my purpose in all that 'guff' as you call it, was to find out how to open that door."

Huston's brow drew together in a frown as he thought deeply.

Gorrity sat breathing heavily. Finally he spoke.

"What about the old newspaper guy he said did the shooting?"

"Huh? Oh, sounded like cock and bull to me. He was trying to get me off the track . . ."

"Well, I must admit you got him dead to rights on the shooting, anyway. We can pin a rap on him for that. And if you can make head or tail out of all that other stuff you pulled, we'll turn the whole department over to you.

"But what gets me is that door all the time. I'm gonna get a search warrant, and take a crew out there and open those doors by force, if we have to dig up the whole bank!"

"No!" exclaimed Huston in alarm. "Don't do that!"

"Then quit trying to prove all those people went into it," said Gorrity in exasperation. "You know as well as I that all we'd find is that we'd have to blast to get 'em out of the wall, and then we wouldn't find anything but the inside of a bank lobby, which we can reach much easier going in the front

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door."

"Yes," said Huston absently. "I wonder what Shorty Pearson *was* doing at that door. Just how *did* he propose to open it? Obviously there is a way. What Bill said proved that. *He's* seen it open. He *knows* it opens. But how? I'm afraid we won't get him to let out another peep about it now . . ."

"I give up!" moaned Gorrity again. "Okay. I'll blow it down in the morning, if for nothing else but to get my peace of mind back again . . ."

"Gorrity!" exclaimed Huston so loudly the sergeant leaped in his chair. "You said something!"

"Y-yeah, sure I did," gasped Gorrity. "But what?"

"Blow!" exclaimed Huston. "That's what Bill said too. He said if I could *blow* hard enough!"

Gorrity reached surreptitiously for the phone.

"Completely gone!" he uttered in an awed whisper. "Bats in the belfry at last . . ."

Huston whipped the little silver whistle from his pocket and put it to his lips. And as he blew on it, the high-pitched notes rang eerily through the room.

"That's the answer!" he exclaimed. "*That's* what Pearson was doing when he was leaning against the door!"

"I thought you said that whistle was yours," accused Gorrity.

"I wanted it," said Huston simply. "I collect odd things, and this was the oddest thing about the whole affair. A toy whistle. And now, Gorrity, if you really want to find out the truth about that door, get your arsenal together and hike down to the bank with me—no, not now; tonight, after midnight. This isn't something the whole town should know about . . ."

"You oughta know!" said Gorrity.

CHAPTER IX

The Monster Out of Hell

"LISTEN, Huston," warned Sergeant Gorrity, "if this is a blind date, I'll clap you in a cell until doomsday. Tonight you'd better show me something, or be prepared to be run out of town on a rail."

"I'll show it to you, I think," said Huston soberly.

"You *think!*" Gorrity's lips tightened. "You'd better do more than think about it. You've made some pretty tough accusations, and you'd better be prepared to back 'em up. Kidnapings, murders, and whatnot."

They walked along the silent street for a few more minutes, then they reached the block where the bank was situated.

Huston pulled the whistle nervously from his pocket and fingered it.

"Here goes," he whispered as they reached the bronze doors.

For a moment he looked up at the carvings, with their grim subjects of evil, and at the writhing figure of the woman, entrapped in the entanglements of sin.

"*Abandon hope all ye who enter here,*" read Sergeant Gorrity slowly. "Even that sounds like it could open."

"We'll see, Sarge," said Huston solemnly.

He put the whistle to his lips.

Softly at first, quavering as Huston's lips refused to steady, the reedy piping began to echo in the darkness of the deserted downtown street. But it grew stronger. Huston remembered the gangster Bill's sarcastic remark anent his ability to 'blow hard enough' and began to expend all his efforts on the cheek-swelling task of blowing the tiny whistle.

Gorrity watched him interestedly, a

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growing look of unbelief and ridicule becoming apparent on his face.

"Nothing's happening," he said with a smirk.

Huston's breath blew explosively from him as the whistle popped from his lips.

"Dammit, can't you keep your mouth shut?" he asked. "This is serious."

Gorrity chuckled.

"Seems pretty funny to me," he said. "Except that I'm losing my beauty sleep."

Huston began blowing again, and for a moment the sound of the whistle was all that was heard.

Then Gorrity spoke again.

"I feel like a sap with all this artillery," he remarked, fingering the submachine-gun in his hands.

Once more Huston's blowing stopped on an explosive note.

"Here, lemme blow it," said Gorrity in growing exasperation. "Bill was right. You can't blow a paper bag fulla air!"

He took the whistle from Huston's hands and placed it between his lips. As his cheeks swelled out to magnificent proportions, the whistle keened through the air like a sharp knife cutting through butter. It seemed to sever the very air particles themselves, and yet it was almost inaudible, so high in the scale was it pitched.

And suddenly Huston's hair rose on his scalp. Icy shivers ran up and down his spine.

"The door!" he croaked. "It's opening."

It was true. The great bronze doors were swinging inward, and a ruddy glow was coming through the cracks that were widening slowly.

The whistle stopped abruptly and Sergeant Gorrity removed it from his lips with a blank look of amazement on his Irish features.

"Holy Mother," he said. "It *is* opening!"

THE red glow in the street grew more pronounced as the crack in the door grew wider. Gorrity backed away a few steps, trembling.

"Come back here!" commanded Huston. "I got left out twice this way before. We're going in the minute we can make it."

"I ain't so sure I wanta go in," said Gorrity with a quaver in his voice.

"Have it your own way," snapped Huston. "If you're yellow . . ."

Gorrity bristled.

"Who's yellow?" he retorted. "Why you newspaper punk . . ."

"Look!" said Huston tensely. "Beyond the door. A stairway, leading down."

Gorrity advanced a few steps and peered into the door, yawning wider now.

"Look at them flames!" he whispered in awe. "You ain't thinking of going into that inferno, are you? We'll be burned to a crisp!"

"Ellen Whitney wasn't," said Huston. "I saw her come out and go back in."

The doors swung wide now, and down what appeared to be a roughly carved stone stairway was a tremendous vista of red flames, and strange figures moved about in the flames.

"Harpies!" gasped Gorrity. "My grandmother used to tell me about them. Creatures with the claws of birds, the wings of bats, and the breasts and head of a woman. To carry souls to hell . . . Huston," he screamed suddenly. "This door leads to Hades!"

"Maybe," said Huston, "but I'm going in."

He advanced, and a curious tingling sensation started on his skin, an itching, burning sensation that was dis-

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tinctly uncomfortable. Suddenly he remembered how the clothes had burned off the bodies of Ellen Whitney and Petey Jimpson. He halted.

Gorrity moved up beside him, his weapon leveled.

"The devil!" he gasped hoarsely. "Coming up the stairway!"

Through the weird flames, seemingly untouched by them, moved an unearthly figure. Huston peered at it, and he paled. It was the same ungodly thing that he had seen grip Elaine Hardwicke in its hypnotic gaze.

It was semi-human in form, with two arms and legs, and a scaly green torso. But here the resemblance ended. The hands were taloned claws. The legs were like those of an animal below the knee, ending in cloven hoofs. The head was a grinning human skull, devoid of flesh. The eyes were empty sockets, but deep in them was a gleam. Curling horns sprouted from this ugly head, and ears oddly like those of a jackass protruded from the base of it. Most horrible of all was the thick tail that dragged and whipped behind it. Like a huge boa-constrictor it was, shiny with scales.

Gorrity lifted his sub-machine-gun to his shoulder and aimed it.

But he didn't fire. Instead he lowered it slowly, and a strange look came into his eyes.

"No," he gasped. "No, I won't do it!"

Then he lurched forward, began shambling down the stone stairway. And Huston, meeting the glow in the hollow eyes of the grinning skull-headed monster, felt an irresistible urge surge through his brain; an urge to go forward, whether he wanted to or not.

He too lurched down the stairway.

And as he went, he felt unutterable agony tear at him, and smoke billowed around him as his clothing burst into flames.

Through the fumes he could see Gorrity, his clothes also a fiery burst of incandescence—and as he looked, in horror, the man's nude body was revealed, red in the glow of this inferno.

Helplessly Huston staggered on down the stairway, and behind him he heard the thud of the bronze doors as they swung back into place.

(To be concluded next month)

And so Arnett Huston has finally opened the door that leads to inferno! What will happen to him? What really lies down those stone stairs? Is this really hell? Does the hell we imagine in our superstitions of harpies, imps, brimstone really exist? Are the legends of Hades true, because men have really seen beyond the door to hell? Don't fail to read the concluding instalment of this sensational novel in our next issue! The year's best fantasy story!

FEROCIOUS—FANTASTIC—FRIGHTENING

By HARLEY WALDEYER

Some fantastic facts about the gorilla

HUGE, hairy, massively monstrous, he lurks in the darkness of the jungles, his screams trumpeting through the brush, his big paws beating in drum-like savagery on his mighty chest. He is called "Ingazi" by the fearful natives, "gorilla" by the whites.

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He is one of nature's strangest children. He has been called the closest resemblance to the "missing link" between Man and the Primordial world. No men deny the incredible brute strength possessed by the gorilla. Few men deny that the hunting of this beast is one of the most dangerous ventures on earth.

All who have encountered the gorilla in his native habitat will admit that the mere sight of him is one of the most spine-chilling experiences imaginable.

Men fear the gorilla, and yet the other beasts of the jungles in which he roams accept him without apparent terror. He has no enemies among these creatures and never bothers them. They, in turn, mind their own business when he is in the neighborhood.

Unhandsome though the gorilla may be, it is paradoxically true that the shaggy savage keeps himself far more personally fastidious than any other jungle dwellers. There are no vermin in his matted hide, and his table manners when dining are far better, according to Emily Post, than those of many of us. He is not a meat eater, his dinners consisting chiefly of bananas, wild celery, small herbs, and tender bamboo shoots.

Though the years make the extinction of the gorilla more and more inevitable, these jungle giants are still numerous enough to travel in bands and live in communities.

Hunters, explorers, and adventurers recount yarns of quiet jungle nights shattered by the roaring and "talking" among the bands of prowling gorilla packs as they move through the brush. But the gorilla seldom does his traveling at night. When twilight comes he makes himself a bed of boughs and leaves where he grabs off enough shuteye to see him through the following day.

Interestingly enough, when great bands of gorillas bed down in an evening encampment, the older gorillas—leaders of the tribe—take key positions at the places most open to attack and maintain guard throughout the night.

Gorillas in captivity are very often short lived, not because of the actual captivity itself, but because of their susceptibility to human diseases. Their mental make up—such as it is—is greatly emotional and affectionate. They are capable of developing strong attachments to their keepers, and one famous gorilla in England died of bitter loneliness when his keeper—a woman in this case—took an extended vacation on the Continent.

In mental efficiency, the gorilla is on a par with the near-kin chimpanzee. This is especially high. He can do practically all of the things a chimp can, and in many instances extends his talents further.

When in docile and mild-mannered moods, the gorilla is utterly harmless and not the least bit malignantly inclined. It is only when he is enraged —and this happens far more frequently when he is in his native habitat—that he becomes the super-vicious killer. One gorilla, it is a matter of absolute record, attacked a man in the jungle and tore his head, literally and gruesomely, from his body!

Of course it is in the jungle, where the great beast is among primitive surroundings, that he is most dangerous. But even those in captivity make extremely dangerous pets. This is due to the fact that they are not capable of realizing the tremendous strength they possess. Occasionally, when you read of some captive gorilla maiming his keeper, you can generally be sure that it was merely the result of a playful, or even an affectionate, gesture!

Generally, we said!

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CHILLY, BUT CHEERING

By JEP POWELL

Mr. Powell once wrote us an article in which he rather startlingly eliminated men from the scheme of things. Comment demanded another article. Well, here it is . . !

CHEER up, men, there's yet hope. Science may have shown the unfair sex how to banish us to the limbo of the dodo, but far-sighted, wise old Science also has shown us how to stage a come-back after years, even centuries, of oblivion.

In a foregoing article in this magazine, I told how Dr. Gregory Pincus, of Clark University, had succeeded in producing a fatherless test-tube rabbit. He achieved this by taking the natural ovum of a doe rabbit, artificially fertilizing it with a simple salt solution and transplanting it to another female rabbit. The resultant offspring was a normal doe, which, in due time, was mated naturally and produced a litter of normal bunnies. Further experiments showed fertilization of the natural ovum could be effected artificially also by incubation at a temperature of 113 degrees Fahrenheit, Dr. Pincus said.

Such fatherless creation is known as parthenogenesis, a perpetuation of species not uncommon in some low forms of animal life. Dr. Pincus' achievement was the first known parthenogenesis in a mammalian creature, highest order of which is mankind.

This left us poor males gasping. Life could go on without us. We were doomed to the same non-essential category as the human appendix and, similarly to that often unwanted adjunct, our amputation from Society might become a tragic eventuality.

We would be supplanted by salt shakers and incubators. And, once lopped from the scheme of life, our absence would be terribly permanent, because all parthenogenetic creatures, lacking the sex-determining Y-chromosome supplied by the male, inevitably are female. But wait—

Now comes this same Dr. Gregory Pincus with a later discovery that may save us—not from extinction but, paradoxically, from eternal extinction. This new wrinkle that may enable us to stage a comeback is, ironically, a refrigerator.

Dr. Pincus made the later discovery while collaborating with Prof. Hudson Hoagland, also of Clark University. They revealed it recently at the annual meeting of the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology at Chicago. And the trick is simply to preserve the male reproductive cells by immersing them in liquid nitrogen at a temperature of 195 degrees below zero, Centigrade.

They had succeeded in reviving 30 to 40 per cent of the reproductive cells after immersion at the low temperature at which life plasm presumably could be kept indefinitely without deterioration.

In commenting on their discovery, M. Wolfe Lerner, bacteriologist at the Applied Research Laboratories, Inc., Dayton, N. J., said, "If sperm could be kept potent indefinitely, the production of offspring by artificial insemination years or even centuries later would be theoretically possible."

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So hail the refrigerator, men, as our savior. Ere all the gals learn of their self-sufficiency and give us the old heave-ho, there is yet time to cache a veritable army of male cells in frigid time capsules. Put our future on ice, as it were.

Then generations, maybe centuries, after the last useless male has been rubbed out in the great sex pogrom, some nosy dame will stumble across a time capsule, open it, and discover multitudes of masculine chromosomes nestling in their cozy 195 degrees below.

"Eureka!" she'll probably whinny to her sisters. "Let's thaw these things out and start 'em sprouting, have some men around like the old-time women had. I need someone to bat the ears off'n."

Thus will man live again. And you can bet your last chromosome we'll be back to stay. The Sweet Things will keep us forever as targets for their taunts and, alas, sometimes more solid missiles. Also they'll keep us as fall guys to take the rap for occasional streaks of cussedness in mama's Little Angels.

But, seriously, there are some rather far-reaching possibilities in the Pincus-Hoagland discovery. Of course, the knowledge gained was intended for use by livestock breeders but, if it is applicable to one mammalian creature, then why not another? Why not mankind?

Lewis W. Morley, executive secretary of the American Jersey Cattle Club, said the discovery might eventually make it feasible to transport germ plasm of cattle around the world and store it indefinitely.

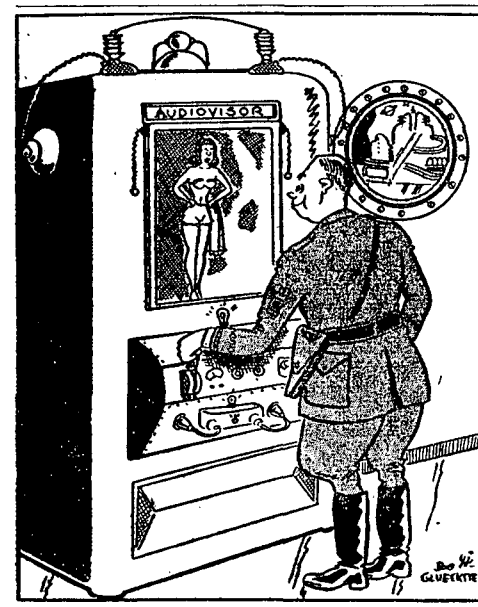
That's interesting. We marvel at the possibility that a prize-winning Longhorn bull may never set hoof off a Texas ranch, yet become the papa of a little Ferdinand in far away Australia. Furthermore, if the plasm may be kept indefinitely, birth of the little Ferdinand could be postponed for ten years, or even ten centuries.

And that's not just a lot of bull. Already in a transcontinental artificial insemination enterprise under the auspices of the aforementioned Cattle Club, a calf with a sire in San Francisco was conceived in New York and born in Arizona.

But even more interesting is the implication that sons and daughters of today's great men may be born centuries hence to carry on in the footsteps of their illustrious long-gone fathers.

If a bozo stopped you on the street today and told you he was a son of Caesar, you'd back away and holler for the wacky wagon. But people of the year 4000 A. D. may pass the time of day with sons of 1950 world figures and think nothing of it.

It might be well to suggest in closing that Hitler and other "bad boys" of the world be denied representation in the frigid time capsules that will be handed down to unsuspecting posterity as frozen assets.



"Well, don't stand there staring—shut the darn thing off, will you!"

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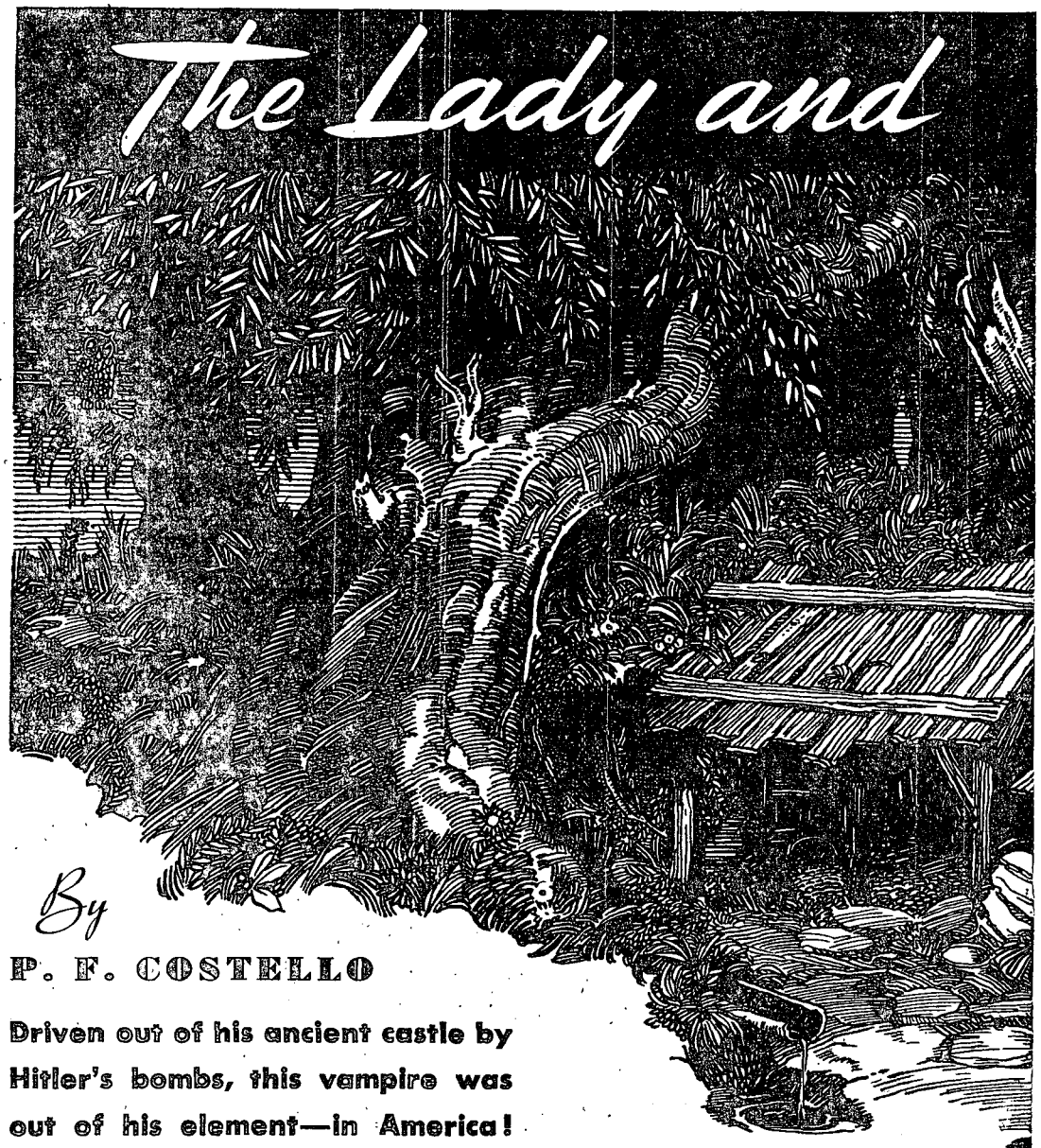
The Lady and



By

P. F. COSTELLO

Driven out of his ancient castle by Hitler's bombs, this vampire was out of his element—in America!

I AM a vampire. In this day and age such a statement may sound a bit startling, but I assure you it is the absolute truth.

My name is Ivan Drackular, late of Austria. Like many of my poor countrymen I was forced to flee from my peaceful home in the Black Forest and seek refuge in this strange land of Brooklyn. I have much to learn, I am afraid, and many adjustments to make in this new country.

In my castle in the Black Forest, which my undead ancestors have inhabited for many pleasant centuries, life was interesting and dignified. The local peasants had been well trained by my forebears and so they accorded me a most gratifying respect.

On dark rainy nights when I would

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the Vampire

I liked to wander through the Black Forest as all respectable vampires do

stroll through the valleys and forests which my castle overlooked, I could feel sure, as I enjoyed the balmy breezes, that the peasants of the neighborhood were cowering in their wooden huts and, as was quite proper, trembling with the fear that I might visit them.

Of course I never did. Vampires too, have felt the softening effects of civilization, and in our set nightly marauding just isn't the thing to do any more. My grandfather, as a matter of fact, was the last of the clan to sleep in a coffin, but then he was notoriously old-

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fashioned.

It was this placid, gracious existence that the coming of the Germans disrupted. There was nothing to do but evacuate the ancestral castle. This I did, accompanied by Louie, a cousin of sorts, who had agreed to make the trip to America with me.

So, as two refugee vampires, we arranged for quarters in this bewildering city of New York, where no one it seems, treats vampires with the proper fearful respect. This is the main reason why I say I must make many adjustments to this new land.

If no one is afraid of vampires here, then I must find something else to do. Being a vampire had been delightful in old Austria, but in New York it is a profitless business.

I thought of this for some time before I finally broached the subject to Louie. It was a dark night and we were seated glumly in our small room when I told him what was running through my head.

"Louie," I said solemnly, "it is time to face facts. In this new world we have no place. There is no opportunity here for us to utilize our peculiar talents in a manner that will keep the wolf from the door."

Louie is small and plump with black hair and eyes, but a most engaging countenance. Now, however, he scowled unpleasantly.

"It is a shame," he said bitterly. "A man spends the best decades of his life as a vampire, leading a happy, carefree existence, then something like this has to happen to him. It isn't fair. But what can we do about it?"

"We can get jobs," I announced triumphantly.

Louie looked at me incredulously.

"As what?" he demanded. "Embalmers?"

"Don't be vulgar," I said reprovingly. "It's rather poor taste to jest about such things, y'know."

"Well," Louie said sulkily, "what can we do? We can't go out in the daytime, we can't get near mirrors, we *can't* do thousands of things. Name something we *can* do."*

I WAS wearing my usual formal clothes and before answering Louie, I stood up and set my top hat at a rakish angle on my head and fastened my silk-lined Inverness cape over my shoulder.

Then I twirled my pointed mustache with a gracious gesture and picked up my cane.

"Doesn't any possible occupation suggest itself to you?" I asked, with just a trace of smugness I'm afraid.

Louie shook his head blankly.

"Well," I said, with a modest laugh, "you see before you the latest member of the Guaranteed White Tie Escort Bureau. I arranged things last night, and tonight I begin my new career. I dislike the idea of prostituting my talents, but still," I shrugged expressively, "even vampires must eat."

"And *drink*," Louie said darkly.

"Don't be an ass," I said drawing on my gloves. "Melodrama doesn't become you, Louie. You know as well as I do that the family put a stop to that barbarous practise ages ago. I'll admit I enjoy rare steaks and a bumper of tomato juice occasionally, but that's as far as it goes."

"Maybe," Louie muttered dubiously, "but if people discover you're a vampire they'll get a lot of superstitious ideas in their heads."

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* According to all accepted vampire authorities, these creatures in human form cannot emerge into the daylight, being in a comatose state during the hours between sunrise and sunset; they cannot face a mirror, or allow themselves to be near one when others are present because no image is reflected, and to do so would be a dead giveaway as to their true identity.—Ed.

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"Yes," I said frowning, "that's just the trouble. People are so damn superstitious. Just because we vampires enjoy an unusually long life and are afflicted with a few physical peculiarities, we're looked upon as something odd. But it can't be helped. So cheerio!"

With that I opened the door and trotted briskly down the rickety steps and into the bustling commotion of Manhattan.

I felt exceptionally fine as I strolled along the street. Adaptability is a great virtue and I realized I possessed it in abundance. Most vampires would have felt a bit strange in my position, but I was able to take it in stride.

Even the attention I received from passing pedestrians was flattering. I am the tall aristocratic type of vampire, and in my faultlessly tailored evening clothes, I imagine the impression I created was somewhat dashing. Just to keep in practise I smiled in my most sinister fashion at several of the attractive young women, but, to my surprise, they smiled right back, and one of them even fluttered her eyelid at me in a most provocative manner.

I was hurt. My sinister smile had driven Austrian peasants screaming to their homes, but here it seemed to have a quite negligible effect.

So I stopped smiling. At the end of the block I judiciously crossed the street to avoid passing before a huge full-length mirror that was hung on the side of a corner store. I am quite accustomed to not seeing my reflection in mirrors but the pedestrians walking behind me might have been startled.

I was half-way across the street when a speeding taxi roared through the intersection. I leaped frantically for the curb and barely made it. The draft from the rocketing vehicle whipped my cape across my face, and the driver bawled something at me, that sounded like:

"Watchwherethehellyou'regoing!"

It took me several minutes to regain my composure.

I wiped the beads of perspiration from my forehead as I continued on my way to the Guaranteed White Tie Escort Service. It is no wonder that the residents of this good town do not fear vampires. For after their daily skirmishes with taxi cab drivers they are equipped to face *anything*.

IN ANOTHER few blocks I reached the conservatively luxurious office of the escort bureau and entered. The gentleman I had met the previous night welcomed me and gave me a slip of paper on which was typed an uptown address.

"You will pick up the young lady at eight sharp," he said. "Remember that the reputation of White Tie Escorts is a precious thing and conduct yourself accordingly."

I nodded gravely. I felt sure I could give this serious young manager at least a stroke by telling him who and what I was, but there was no necessity to do this. I saw no reason why the fact that I was a vampire should detract from my desirability as an escort.

I nodded again and left. With some misgivings I hailed a cab and proceeded to rocket through the tunnel-like streets until we stopped with a lurching jar before a five-storied, brownstone house. I paid the man off, feeling lucky to have made the journey in one piece.

If the Nazi's ever attempt an invasion of this peaceful land they will have taxicabs to face as the first line of offense.

Somewhat cautiously I made my way up the broad steps and rang the bell. The door opened almost instantly and an imperturbable butler peered out at

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me. Then he swung the door wide and stepped back.

"Won't you please step in, sir," he said with professional civility.

With a slight bow I followed him into a spacious, elaborately furnished ante room, that was lighted by several huge crystal chandeliers. The butler left me then, and I studied my surroundings with frank approval. Everything was stamped with the impress of wealth and position. Rugs, tapestries, furniture, everything was of the finest quality and in the best of taste.

Since I sprang from a rather impoverished branch of the family, these things were all the more delightful to me. When a vampire has been spending his centuries in a vast, drafty castle, and trying his best to keep up appearances, he learns to appreciate the really nice things of life.

I suppose I was waiting not more than five or ten minutes when two sliding doors opened and a girl appeared. She was dressed in a clinging formal gown and as she glided forward, a faint hesitant smile touched her rosy lips.

"A—are you from the escort bureau?" she asked breathlessly.

I was so stunned by her delightfully fresh beauty that I found it hard to answer. Her hair was blonde, with gleaming lights of red flashing through it, and her skin was creamily white. All of this loveliness was scarcely an adequate background however, for her immense blue eyes, as clear and deep as pools of lake water.

Recovering myself I swept my hat from my head and bowed gallantly.

"Consider my as your slave," I said fervently.

For an instant she smiled radiantly, but then her gaiety vanished and a cloud hovered over her eyes.

"Is there a blanket charge for compliments," she said bitterly, "or do you just throw them in as charity?"

"My dear young lady," I said with some stiffness, "the charity is all on your part."

"I'm sorry," she said flushing. "It's all my fault anyway. Now shall we go?"

I ESCORTED her to the street in silence, and helped her into the magnificent limousine that was waiting for us. I was considerably puzzled as I seated myself beside her. Why, I asked myself, should such a beautiful girl find it necessary to hire an escort? I shook my head in deep puzzlement. The world thinks vampires are odd, but situations like this pass over as quite normal. Maybe it is not the vampires who are crazy.

I saw that the young lady had a cigarette in her mouth so I hastened to strike a match and hold it for her.

"Thank you," she said. "Now where do we go?"

I shrugged my shoulders and smiled.

"Wherever you like."

"How about the Mirror Bar?" she asked.

This did not sound so good. I ran a finger inside my collar and thought quickly. It wouldn't do for me to expose my reflection-less self in a place called the Mirror Bar.

"That would be delightful," I said, "but—" I paused and glanced at her questioningly.

"But what?" she demanded.

"Then you haven't heard?" I asked with an nice mixture of incredulity and amazement in my voice.

"Heard what?" she asked, frowning.

"Perhaps I shouldn't mention it," I said, "but there are ugly rumors circulating to the effect that one of the bartenders there has a mild case of leprosy."

She gasped in horror, and turned

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white.

"It's incredible," she exclaimed.

I shrugged and leaned forward.

"Chauffeur," I directed, "take us to the Mirror Bar."

"No, no," she said breathlessly. She grabbed my arm and pulled me back into the seat. "We'll go somewhere else."

I smiled at her and patted her hand.

We finally decided on the theatre. After the first tenseness of the evening wore away, I discovered that my beautiful companion was delightful company and that her name was Ellen. We had a gay time and there was much laughter and nonsense. Her sense of humor was well developed, and her mind was keen and stimulating. More and more was I puzzled. I asked myself again: Why should such a completely delightful creature find it necessary to hire an escort? But I could find no answer.

After the theater we found a tiny, old fashioned restaurant and I discovered that candle light brought out many more shades of red and gold in her hair than I had imagined existed.

I ordered a steak.

"I'll have it raw, I mean well-done," I corrected myself to the waiter, "and bring me a glass of beet juice."

"What an odd dinner," Ellen said laughing. She was looking straight into my eyes and she stopped laughing. "There's something strange about you," she said, "but I can't figure out what it is. Your eyes are so dark and your skin is so white, but I suppose that's because of the life you lead."

"That has something to do with it," I said wryly.

AFTER dinner we attended a night club, where people blew horns in ours ears and smoke in our faces and wrestled with each other. I was somewhat surprised to learn that we were expected to pay the management for all this. It should have been the other way around.

At last the evening was over, and just in time. As I said good night to my lovely charge the first rays of the morning sun were just slanting over the roofs of the houses. It was curfew for me. I had to be back in my room before the sun arose.

"It's been a lot of fun," Ellen said happily. "Let's sit here a while on the steps and watch the sun come up."

"That will be impossible," I stammered, backing down the steps.

She looked hurt for an instant, then she smiled.

"All right, but let's pick up from here again tonight. You can consider yourself hired for the remainder of the week."

"Wonderful," I cried.

I blew her a kiss and dashed down the street . . .

I reached the room barely under the wire. Louie had the shades drawn and was slumped in a chair dozing. I relaxed in the soothing darkness of the room and sighed comfortably.

"Well, how'd things go?" Louie grunted, waking up.

"Splendidly," I answered. "I am an unqualified success at this escort business. The future is bright."

"You aren't the only one with a job," Louie said morosely. "I've got one, too."

He pressed something close to his lapel and a gorgeous neon sign blazed across the front of his starched shirt. It read:

DRINK RED-DRIP TOMATO JUICE

I goggled at it speechlessly.

"I walk up and down Broadway,"

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Louie went on glumly, "flashing this on and off. I got the job because I had formal clothes and wanted to work nights. It's a helluva job for a genuine vampire, is all I can say."

Louie, although he is a fine chap, has a touch of the snob in his make-up.

"Well," I said, stretching myself on the bed, "it's better than nothing." I was silent for a minute as a peculiarly irrelevant thought struck me. "Wouldn't it be funny," I mused out loud, "if a vampire fell in love?"

"Funny," Louie snorted, "it'd be tragic."

Strangely enough his reply saddened me. I dozed off thinking about Ellen, wondering what she'd be wearing the next time I saw her.

IT TURNED out to be a backless, white velvet evening gown that transformed her into an ethereal creature, consisting of gold and white mistiness and a glorious smile.

She actually took my breath away as she advanced and took my arm. (I didn't realize until later how fortunate it was that she did take my breath away.)

"You look positively divine," I said as I helped her into the car for the second night's entertainment.

"Thank you," she said seriously.

I settled myself beside her and then I noticed it.

I couldn't believe my nose for an instant. I sniffed twice in incredulous horror, and then I frantically rolled down the back windows of the car and let the strong cold wind rush in on us.

"What is it?" Ellen asked apprehensively.

"Garlic!" I gasped. "Can you smell it?"

I scrambled to the side of the car and let the wind blow into my face until my nausea passed. It had been a terrible blow to have the acrid odor of garlic wafted over me that way. For garlic is to the vampire what the silver bullet is to the were-wolf.* A stake through the heart would almost be preferable to a steady exposure to the hideous fumes of the loathsome vegetable.

When my senses were under control again I rolled up the window and sank weakly against the cushions of the car.

"That was terrible," I said faintly, still trembling from the harrowing incident.

"Can't you stand garlic?" Ellen asked wistfully.

There it was again! Garlic! The odor was everywhere.

I scrambled to the windows again.

"It's you!" I strangled. "You've been eating garlic, haven't you?"

"Yes," she said in a small, guilty voice. "I always eat it. I can't keep away from it. That's why I have to hire an escort when I want to go out. None of the boys will take me."

I glared at her accusingly.

"Do you blame them?" I cried bitterly.

She began to cry then. Small sobs shook her body and she burried her nose in her handkerchief.

"You're just like all the rest," she wailed.

She looked so piteous as she cried that I started to take her in my arms to comfort her, but I couldn't force myself to get any nearer to those maddening fumes of garlic.

BY OPENING all of the windows and breathing very cautiously I

* It is a well-known fact that the strong, bitter odor of garlic is one of the few things that render a vampire practically helpless. Since the earliest days, when the existence of vampires was just becoming known, this method has been employed to immunize homes against the nightly marauding of vampires.—Ed.

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was able to remain in the back of the car.

"Why do you eat garlic?" I demanded.

She sniffed.

"Can't help it."

"I didn't notice any last night," I said sternly. "Was this your idea of a pleasant surprise?"

"I wanted to make a good impression," she blubbered, "so I didn't eat any all day yesterday. But today I just couldn't help myself. I ate t-two garlic sandwiches for supper."

I groaned. Here was a girl who had stirred me as no mortal creature had ever before and she had turned out to be a garlic fiend.

"You can take me home now," she sobbed.

I squirmed uneasily. I didn't *want* to take her home, but what could I do? I was on the point of giving the necessary instructions to the chauffeur when an absurd streak of chivalry reared its illogical head.

"Nonsense," I said, between gulps of fresh air from the open window, "we won't let a little garlic interfere with our good time. I—I don't exactly like the stuff, but I can put up with it if you can."

She blew her nose and dried her eyes and bestowed a look on me that almost —I say "almost"—made my sacrifice worth while.

The evening passed in a foggy, unbearable daze. Through the blinding mists of garlic I remember kaleidescopic scenes of night clubs, theatres, restaurants, but nothing very clearly.

It is a wonder that I did not suffocate. But it is more wonderful that I stuck the evening out to its slow, painful culmination. Ellen was like a goddess. Never have I seen such sheer, heart-breaking beauty. But that was scant compensation for the agony I was forced to endure in her company.

When the wretched night was finally over I staggered homeward, a dazed, groggy figure. Louie leaped to his feet as I stumbled into the darkened room and collapsed in a chair.

"For goodness sake," he exclaimed. "What is it?"

Then he sniffed, and an expression of horror crossed his normally pleasant features.

"Garlic," he muttered. "You're reeking with it."

I nodded dumbly.

"Don't desert me," I begged. "It was the girl. Garlic fiend. Eats it in sandwiches. I'm almost dead."

Louie hurried to the window and jerked it open.

"Good thing you got out of it alive," he said. "You aren't going to see her any more are you?" It was purely a rhetorical question with him, one that demanded no answer.

But I did answer.

"Yes, Louie," I said dully, "I'm going to see her again tomorrow night and every night this week. I have to. Garlic is devilish stuff, but not seeing her would be worse. I've got to see her."

AND I did. In spite of Louie's protestations, in spite of my own common sense, the next evening found me in her company, escorting her from one blazing night spot to another and almost killing myself in the attempt.

I couldn't analyze the madness that made me risk myself, torture myself, to be near her. It was some strange alchemy with which I was unfamiliar. It had transformed me from a cool, calculating vampire into an illogical, pseudo-heroic jackass.

Strange as it may sound I was happy in her company even though it required a staunch effort of will to keep from

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tearing myself from her and spending the rest of my days in an air-conditioned theatre.

And then I discovered the reason for this peculiar state of affairs. I was saying good night to her and suddenly I noticed the light of the moon on her eyes and on her lips and on her slim white throat.

I leaned forward unable to help myself—and kissed her!

When my head stopped spinning deliriously I thought pityingly of all the poor vampires skulking through the world, scaring children and boring themselves, completely unaware of this great thing called love. The decades I had wasted frightening peasants suddenly loomed before me, an acute reminder of what I had been missing.

I kissed her again.

"I love you," she said softly.

"And I love you, too," I said, kissing her again.

After several more introductions to this great game called love, I bade Ellen a fond and tender good night, and took my departure happily and hopefully.

I walked on air until I reached the boarding house, but when I saw Louie's gloomy face the realities of the situation were forced upon me.

"Louie," I said, "I have fallen in love. I am happier than I can ever remember. What do you think of it?"

"Love?" Louie cried scornfully. "You're mad. Love's a lot of nonsense."

"As an expert speaking to a rank novice," I said with pardonable superiority, "I can inform you that there is lots more to love than meets the eye. It has — er — unexplored possibilities I'm sure."

"It won't work," Louie said, shaking his head emphatically. "You are a vampire. You can't exist in the daylight, you don't reflect in mirrors, you have strange ideas and cravings, you can't stand garlic and dozens of other things. What kind of a husband do you think you'd make?"

I slumped into a chair. I *had* forgotten a number of things.

"But she loves me," I said dolefully. "And I love her."

"She eats garlic," Louie said bluntly. "You couldn't live with her. Will you stop talking sheer nonsense! You're a vampire! You should never have left your castle in Austria."

"Ellen's father has a castle in Florida," I said defensively. "Modern plumbing, too," I added.

"It won't work," Louie said again. He was pacing the floor in his agitation. "We shouldn't have left Austria. Look at me!"

He pressed a button and the RED-DRIP tomato sign flared startlingly across his shirt.

"Is that a respectable occupation for a vampire?" he demanded bitterly.

"Still class conscious, aren't you?" I said scathingly. "Still all puffed up with pride in family and position, I see." I was a trifle angry because his arguments had baffled me.

"Well my grandfather doesn't still sleep in a coffin," Louie retorted hotly. "Not in the living room, anyway."

"That makes you quite an aristocrat, doesn't it?" I said sarcastically. "But whose great-grandfather was it who was actually caught drinking you-know-what?"

"That's rather a low blow, I think," Louie said stiffly. "Anyway he was only my great-grandfather by marriage."

More verbal blows were struck until we finally both retired to our beds in an injured silence. If one must live with a vampire, I thought as I dropped off to sleep, it would be well to find one who was not family conscious, nor so logical.

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THAT night I saw Ellen again and she was more beautiful and desirable than ever before. I didn't even mind the garlic so much. Except for a few instances when I almost strangled, it had little effect on me. But in spite of this, Louie's gloomy words cast a pall over the evening.

Ellen was sweetly affectionate, but it was difficult for me to match her gay mood. More and more forcibly I was realizing the gap between us was one that nothing could bridge.

It was as we were saying good night that I finally realized the utter hopelessness of the situation.

"Darling," Ellen said sweetly. "I've written father all about you and he's wild to meet you. He's in Florida now and can't get away, but he just insists that we come down there for a few days so he can get to know you. You will come, won't you?"

"Well, h—how nice," I managed to gasp. "Florida, you say?"

"You'll love it," Ellen cried enthusiastically. "Bathing, tennis, golf, surf board riding, and best of all the beautiful hot Florida sun just shining all the time. Why in three days there you'll be as brown as an Indian. It's just what you need too. You're so pale Ivan, that it worries me."

"Sun," I echoed hollowly.

"Yes," Ellen chattered on, "we'll spend fourteen hours a day in the sun. Lying on the beach, playing tennis, swimming, it'll be wonderful."

"No night clubs," I said wistfully. "No theatres?"

"Of course not, silly. You wouldn't want to miss the sun, would you?"

It was then I realized how hopeless and impossible had been my dream of marrying this beautiful girl.

"I can't go," I said desperately. "I —I can't get away."

"You don't love me," Ellen said, starting to cry. This was my first experience with female logic and it was slightly terrifying.

I invented excuses by the gross, but it was no good.

"If you aren't on the nine o'clock train tomorrow morning," she wailed, "I'll know you don't care about me. G—good night!"

With that she turned and slipped through the door.

I WALKED home despondently. Everything was lost. For it was absolutely unthinkable that I go to Florida. *Sun, beautiful hot sun.* I shuddered and hurried on. Five minutes in the daylight would finish me for good. The next time you envy a vampire, remember that there are certain drawbacks to the situation.

I did not sleep that morning. I tossed from side to side and cursed the fate that made me what I was. When the rays of the morning sun filtered faintly through our closely shuttered windows I got up.

Louie was already up, but we were not speaking to each other.

Therefore it was somewhat of a surprise when he leaped to his feet and stared at me as if he were seeing a ghost.

"What's happened to you?" he cried.

I glanced down at myself and then back at him inquiringly.

"Me?" I said. "Everything bad that's possible, but do you notice some fresh calamity?"

"I'll say I do!" he cried.

He hurried to my side, reached his hand up to my head and plucked a hair loose. He held it in front of my nose in horror.

"It's a *gray* hair," he cried in horror. "You've got at least three more in your scalp."

I glanced over my shoulder and

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caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror and sure enough there were three gray hairs, standing out plainly against the glossy blackness of my scalp.

Then my knees filled with water.

For the first time in two centuries I was viewing my reflection in a mirror!

"Look!" I shrieked. "In the mirror! It's me."

I was not too excited to notice that the features that were staring back at me were extremely handsome, in an aristocratic sort of way.

LOUIE stared from the image in the mirror to the gray hair he still held in his trembling fingers. A look of horrified realization spread over his face.

"It's happened," he whispered, "it's happened. The garlic did it. You've gone too far, Ivan. There is no hope for you. The garlic has robbed you of your vampire powers. That is why our ancestors taught us the great fear of the vile vegetable. For it has the power to change a vampire completely, to rob him of his eternal life, to destroy his irresistibility to mirrors. It robs a vampire of everything. It has done it to you. You are no longer a vampire, Ivan. Oh it is good your poor father does not know of this humiliation."

"Well," I said breathlessly. "Isn't this a situation."

"Wait," Louie cried imperatively. "There may be still time to save you. If you abhor the garlic like the fiends themselves you might still have a chance. As long as you are constantly exposed to its vile influence you will always be deprived of your vampire nature."

"What time is it Louie?" I demanded suddenly.

"W—what?" he spluttered. Then he glanced at his watch. "It's eight fifty. What difference does that make?"

"Just enough," I shouted, "for me to catch the Dixie Flyer. I'm no longer a vampire, and if the United States can continue to import garlic for my future wife, I'll stay this way. Cheerio!"

I plunged out of the room and down the steps—into the glorious sunshine. A cab got me to the station at eight fifty-nine, and as I sprinted down the ramp alongside the Dixie Flyer I saw Ellen standing in front of the club car steps ordering the porter to take her luggage *off* the train.

"Hold it!" I yelled.

She saw me and yelled hysterically, then ordered the porter to put her luggage back *on* the train.

"I couldn't go without you," she sobbed as I wrapped my arms around her.

We climbed on board, but before the doors were slammed a Western Union boy dashed up and shoved a message into my hands. Then the train chugged out of the station.

The message was from Louie. It said:

"Goodbye old friend. I'm going back to Austria. If I meet Adolf, I will forget my good breeding and refinement and do you-know-what. There is no place here for me. May your children take after their mother.

Yours,
Louie."

"What is it?" Ellen asked, when I finished it.

"Just a note of congratulations," I said, "from an old drinking companion. Have you had breakfast?"

"I'm starved," she said, leading me to the dining car.

I studied the menu over the gleaming white napery.

"A steak," I said to the hovering waiter, "*very, very* well done and smothered with garlic."

"Garlic, sir?"

"Garlic! Lots of it."

Then I leaned over and kissed Ellen.

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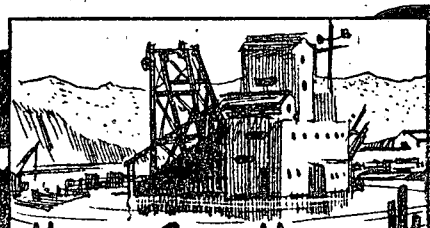
Romance of the Elements - - - Gold

THE "GOLDEN FLEECE" OF JASON

AND HIS ARGONAUTS, BROUGHT HOME TO LEGENDARY GREECE WAS PROBABLY A GOAT OR SHEEP-SKIN LADEN WITH GOLD DUST WHICH JASON "FILCHED" FROM HARD WORKING ARMENIAN MINERS! ONE PRIMITIVE WAY TO TRAP GOLD WAS TO LEAD GOLD BEARING STREAMS OVER WOOLEY HIDES; THE WOOL FILTERED OUT THE GOLD, LET THE WATER ESCAPE. . .

WHEN WE THINK OF GOLD PRODUCTION WE ROMANCE ABOUT THE FORTUNE SEEKERS WHO TREKKED TO CALIFORNIA IN THE 50's. BUT COLD FACTS SHOW THAT ABOUT 60% OF ALL GOLD MINED SINCE 1493 HAS BEEN PRODUCED THIS CENTURY!



MODERN GOLD MINING

IS "BIG BUSINESS": HUGE DREDGES AND OTHER EXPENSIVE EQUIPMENT GO THROUGH HARD, COSTLY PROCESSES TO GET THE PRECIOUS METAL. WHEN U.S. GOLD PRICES WERE UPPED IN 1934, THOUSANDS STARTED PANNING THE WESTERN STREAMS. BUT FEW MADE WORTHWHILE PROFITS; INDIVIDUAL PROSPECTING IS USUALLY "SMALL POTATOES".

A ROBE WOVEN ENTIRELY OF GOLD

WAS WORN BY AGRIPPINA WIFE OF ROME'S EMPEROR, CLAUDIUS. IN ADDITION TO ITS "MONEY VALUE", GOLD IS USED COMMERCIALLY: IN TOOTH FILLINGS, FOR EXAMPLE; FOR GILT LETTERING; IN PLACE OF SILVER IN THE MIRRORS OF "BEAMLESS" SEARCHLIGHTS.

A SINGLE GRAIN OF GOLD

HAS BEEN BEATEN OUT TO COVER 75 SQUARE INCHES; THIS MAKES GOLD THE 367,650TH PART OF AN INCH THICK. 1 OUNCE OF GOLD COVERING A SILVER WIRE CAN BE EXTENDED 1300 MILES!

GOLD is number 79 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is Au and its atomic weight is 197.2. It is a yellow, shining metal. Its specific gravity is 19.32 and its melting point is 1063°. It is the most malleable and ductile of metals. It is found in quartz and alluvial sands and gravels, usually associated with other metals, copper, silver, iron. It is used mostly in coinage and in jewelry.

NEXT MONTH—The Romance of Helium

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HOWIE LEMP Meets an Enchantress

by WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

The Leanhaun Shee lived on love—and she was the slave of any man who could resist the enchantment of her charms!

THE meteoric rise of Howie Lemp to the head of Colossal Films was one of those things that happen too frequently in Hollywood to cause a great deal of excitement.

The City of Celluloid has come to accept Boy Wonders in the same spirit they would any natural phenomenon. That is, as something inexplicable, but inevitable. Usually the human eccentricities that thrive in the eccentric atmosphere of Hollywood are speedily eclipsed and forgotten.

For that reason it is a remarkable fact that the feminine star Howie Lemp brought to Hollywood with him will *never* be forgotten. It would be easier to forget an earthquake than to forget the amazing girl who precipitated the chain of events that finally led Howie Lemp to Bagdad-on-the-Pacific.

Looking back, the first link of the chain was forged, so to speak, when Howie Lemp was jerking sodas for Rupp's Drug Store in Chicago. It was during the morning rush when Howie looked up and suddenly noticed Mazie Slatter for the first time. He had seen her before, for Mazie was a waitress at Rupp's, but it wasn't until this particular morning that he realized that her hair was the exact shade of the deviled egg he was spreading dexterously between two slices of toasted white.

He stopped spreading the deviled egg and swallowed the sudden lump in his throat.

"Mazie," he said awkwardly, "would —would you like to go to a show tonight?"

Mazie tossed two lumps of ice cream into a tall glass before looking up at him. By ordinary standards Mazie would not be considered beautiful. To be blunt, it is doubtful that Mazie would have been considered beautiful by *any* standards. Her skin was sallow and her hair was a streaky blonde and her figure might remind you of an overstuffed pillow that had been tied together at the middle.

But to Howie she was suddenly The Girl.

He looked anxiously at her.

"Well?" he said weakly. "I thought you might like to."

Mazie's eyes traveled unenthusiastically over Howie's lanky frame, past his

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She was furious. "You scorn me for THAT creature!"

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out-sized adam's apple and on to his horn-rimmed spectacles, watery blue eyes, receding forehead and thin brown hair.

Then she laughed sarcastically.

"Why should I go to a show with you?" she asked, "when I can take in a side-show by just looking at you."

She stuck a cherry on top of the soda she was concocting and waddled off, leaving Howie staring after her, crimson-cheeked and miserable.

After a few seconds he returned to the deviled egg sandwich but his heart was not in his work. For suddenly and completely he had fallen in love with Mazie Slatter. Even her sarcastic rejoinder was only additional evidence of her wit and cleverness.

He finished the sandwich and started another mechanically.

"I can't let myself go to pieces," he thought grimly.

For the rest of the morning he filled orders heroically, and no one could have told from his sad, melancholy expression that the pangs of unrequited love were gnawing away at his soul.

For Howie Lemp always looked sad and melancholy.

AT lunch time he got out of the store quickly and crossed to the park where he invariably drank his quart of milk and ate his two hard boiled eggs in the forty-five minutes allotted him by the proprietor of Rupp's Drug Store.

He ate an egg in solemn silence and thought wistfully of Mazie Slatter. With each passing second it seemed his devotion and love increased. He ate his second egg and polished off a pint of milk and then dropped his head into his long bony hands.

"I guess I was born to suffer," he muttered brokenly.

For a moment there was a complete silence in the sunny park. Then:

"Why?"

The voice, soft and caressing, sounded beside him.

Howie sighed soulfully.

"Why?" the caressing voice persisted.

Shaken from his gloomy reverie Howie took his head from his hands and looked up. A girl was seated beside him on the park bench, her dark eyes resting on him in limpid compassion.

Howie hadn't heard the girl come up and sit down and he wondered about this for a second. Then he straightened up, self consciously aware of her intense gaze.

"Why are you unhappy?" she asked.

Howie turned to the girl impulsively, eager to pour forth the sorry story of his great affection for Mazie and her callous disregard of him. So absorbed was he in his own plight he did not particularly notice the amazing beauty of the girl sitting beside him.

Her hair was dark with strange highlights of blue that glistened in the sun, forming a shimmering halo about her delicate, perfectly molded features. In her eyes of deep cobalt blue, sultry fires seemed to leap and dance. There was something ageless and deathless about her loveliness, as if it were too beautiful to be ravaged by even Time itself. She wore a plain white dress that was almost severe in Grecian simplicity, but which accentuated perfectly her slim, delightfully curved figure.

Howie disregarded all of these abundant charms. If he even saw them he did not indicate it by so much as a flicker of an eyelash. He plunged into his story, happy for sympathetic ears to absorb it. He talked on, adding one glowing word after another in praise of Mazie's beauty and charm. When he could think of nothing else to add he sighed with all of the reverence of a

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Tibetian monk in the presence of the Inner Mysteries and lapsed into moody silence.

"Is she so beautiful?" the dark haired girl asked.

Howie sighed.

"There's no other woman like her," he said.

"Is she," the dark haired girl's voice was as soft as a summer's breeze, "is she more beautiful than I?"

Howie turned and looked at the dark haired girl critically.

"You're kind of pretty," he said, "but you haven't got the same cute wrinkles in your neck that Mazie has."

The dark haired girl's face remained expressionless but there was a flicker of angry astonishment behind her smouldering eyes.

"Look at me," she whispered.

HOWIE looked at her. He saw her slightly parted lips, her burning blue eyes, her slender voluptuousness. She moved closer to him, one soft white hand stealing across his shoulder to caress the back of his head.

"Can't you forget this other girl?" she whispered. "We could be happy together, you and I. Look into my eyes and tell me if it would be difficult to love me."

Howie squirmed uncomfortably and shifted away from the girl.

"It wouldn't be difficult for a person to fall in love with you," he said awkwardly. "You're really nice and pretty and everything." He tried desperately to think of something to say that would be kind and at the same time would discourage her intentions toward him.

"You just be patient," he added, "and some nice young man will come along. As for me though, I'm in love with the only girl for me, Mazie."

The dark haired girl's features were unchanged, but there was dawning consternation in the depths of her eyes.

"Do you mean," she asked, and there was a faintly anxious tone in her smooth voice, "that you are able to ignore me for this other girl? Surely she cannot be a tenth as desirable as I. Please look at me. You must see that I am beautiful. I could make you happier than you dream possible if you will only look at me and love me."

"I'm sorry," Howie said with finality, "but that just isn't possible. I've told you you're pretty—after a manner. But I'm in love with Mazie and nothing can change that. We got some good looking boys over in the store jerking sodas and if you'd like, I could maybe fix things up for you with one of them. But as for me, that's out."

He ran a long finger around the inside of his collar and moved a few inches away from the girl. A dizzy feeling of desperation was sweeping over him. He was no Casanova and he knew it, but this girl was acting as if he were a combination of Clark Gable and William the Conqueror.

"I've got to be getting back to the store," he said apologetically, "it's been nice knowing—"

"You can't go," the dark haired girl cried passionately. "You mustn't leave me. I need you. I must have you. Why don't you take me? Everything I have, everything I am will be yours to use as you wish. Only tell me you find me desirable and you love me and I will be yours."

The girl's beautiful, haunting features were strained and fearful and a nameless terror was lurking deep in her eyes.

"You mustn't leave me," she begged. "You must say you love me and that you will be mine. Please tell me you can't resist me."

"I'd like to oblige you," Howie

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stammered breathlessly, "but I just can't do it."

He scrambled to his feet and shoved the half-empty bottle of milk into her hands.

"Here," he said desperately, "maybe this'll help you. It's on me."

He wheeled then and sprinted across the grass . . .

WHEN Howie Lemp reached the drug store, he was panting strenuously. Ducking inside, he hastily wrapped a clean apron around him and took his place behind the counter with a vast sigh of relief. He had been in a few uncomfortable spots in his lifetime, but never one that equalled the predicament he had just escaped. For several blissful seconds he enjoyed the sensation of security and then one of his fellow clerks nudged him.

"Lookit!" he whispered. "Lookit the doll at the end of the counter. Baby is she a knockout. And she's giving you the eye."

"Where?" Howie asked.

He needn't have asked that question. All he needed to have done was to follow the gaze of all the male employees and customers in the store. They were all staring in unconcealed admiration at an incredibly beautiful girl with blue-black hair and great flashing eyes that were now resting limpidly and adoringly on a tall, gangling soda jerker by the name of Howie Lemp.

Howie swallowed nervously as he recognized the amorous creature who had shared the park bench with him some few minutes ago. She *was* looking at him. But all of the fear and consternation had left her. Now she was apparently the happiest creature in the world, smiling at him with a secretive, dreamy smile that was similar in kind if not in quality to that of a love struck adolescent mooning over an autographed picture of Robert Taylor.

"What've you got that I ain't," Howie's fellow clerk whispered enviously. "If a dame like that gave me the eye I'd drop everything and run."

Blushing to the roots of his thin hair Howie hurled himself into the job of constructing a ham-and-cheese triple-decker. Why was this girl following him? What did she want? These unanswerable questions buzzed around in his head as he worked.

"Ham on rye," a nasal voice sang out, and looking up, Howie saw Mazie standing in front of him. "It's a special," she snapped, "for Old Man Potterson, so be careful."

Howie nodded. Potterson was one of the big shots from the Colossal Studio office on the fifth floor. He was a Hollywood producer, but he spent a good deal of time traveling on the search for talent. A liberal tipper, but he was finicky about his food.

"About tonight," Howie said desperately, as Mazie was turning away. "Haven't you changed your mind about taking in that show with me?"

Mazie looked at him coldly, then her gaze flicked down the counter to the gorgeous brunette who was still smiling seductively at Howie.

"Why don't you ask *her?*" she snapped. "She seems to be interested in oddities in the news."

CRUSHED and miserable Howie listlessly went on with his work. In his benumbed condition he slapped sandwiches together automatically, too miserable to think of anything but the hopelessness of his condition. A glamorous witch who wouldn't leave him alone and who was souring Mazie on him even more than ever. Which was quite a lot, he was forced to admit dolefully.

The store was filling up with customers, he noticed lackadaisically.

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Most of them however, he noticed, were not buying anything, but merely clogging up the aisles and counters staring and oogling the bewitchingly beautiful brunette who was perched provocatively on the end stool. He risked a hasty glance at her.

Her smile widened as she caught his eye and she winked at him, coyly and intimately.

Howie dropped his eyes to the sandwich board and groaned.

Things were terrible. They couldn't get any worse.

In that he was mistaken.

Suddenly from one of the tables in the rear of the store an enraged bellow sounded. It was like a rogue elephant trumpeting defiance in the jungle, or a maddened bull roaring at a red flag. Only it was worse because it was "Stormy" Potterson of Colossal Films.

"I won't stand for it," Potterson was bellowing lustily and Howie could see his huge, red-faced figure lumbering toward the front of the store.

"I'll break whomever's responsible for this," he shouted. "It's one thing I will not stand tampering with."

He shoved his way through the bug-eyed crowd at the counter and pointed a fat finger at Howie.

"Young man," he said at the top of his voice, "did you make my sandwich? Answer me yes or no, and don't try and pass the buck."

Howie swallowed nervously, then squared his shoulders.

"I won't do any buck passing," he said, "I made it."

"Oh did you?" Potterson almost howled. "And you admit it, brazenly and impudently."

He suddenly lifted his arm and extended a soppy object toward Howie.

"And did you put this in it?" he exploded.

Howie's eye's widened in horror as he recognized the object in Potterson's hand. It was the flat sponge he used in swabbing up the sandwich board. His eyes flashed to the receptacle where it should have been, but the receptacle was quite empty.

And the receptacle was just next to the ham plate!

He knew in one horrified second what had happened. He had stuck the sponge in Potterson's sandwich while he was brooding over his troubles.

"Well!" Potterson shouted the word. "Did you put it in my sandwich or didn't you?"

HOWIE opened his mouth, but he didn't get a chance to speak. For the mysterious brunette stepped into the picture at that instant. She stepped alongside Potterson and tapped him on the shoulder. Her pale cheeks were touched with spots of color and her eyes flashed like twin beacons of fury.

"You can't talk like that to him," she said softly. "No one can in my presence. Do you understand?"

"Who says—" Potterson began to bluster, but he suddenly lost his voice as he looked at the dark-haired girl. For fully a minute he sputtered helplessly, and then he wiped his damp forehead with a trembling hand.

"Let's go somewhere where we can talk," he said weakly. "I'm Potterson of Colossal Films." His eyes traveled over the girl's beauty with the swiftness of the experienced showman. "I'm sure I can make you an offer that you would find acceptable."

"I am not interested in offers," the girl said. "Only your apology to my friend."

"Sure," Potterson said eagerly. "We all make mistakes." He waved genially to Howie who was watching the scene with his mouth open a full three inches. "Forget it son. Sorry I lost my head."

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He turned back to the dark-haired girl.

"My company," he said rapidly, "is the largest in the business. We can give you the build-up you need. I can practically guarantee you stardom inside of six months."

The dark-haired girl smiled languorously.

"That's what the other gentleman said. He also said his company was the largest. But he promised me stardom in three months."

"Who're you talking about?" Potterson snapped shrewdly.

"The gentleman from Superba Films," the dark-haired girl said innocently. "I might add that his offer was extremely interesting."

Potterson mopped his brow. He took another searching look at the girl, appraising her eyes, her hair, her figure. She stood before him like something from Heaven, but amused and scornful.

Potterson snapped his fingers.

"I'll double his offer," he barked. "Whatever it was I'll double it."

"It isn't up to me to decide," the dark-haired girl answered.

"You got an agent?" Potterson demanded.

The dark-haired girl nodded her beautiful head.

"I wouldn't make any decision unless he told me it was acceptable to him. I trust him implicitly. He's more than an agent to me. He's everything!"

"Who is he?" Potterson demanded hoarsely.

"You were shouting at him a minute ago," the dark-haired girl answered coldly. She wheeled dramatically and pointed straight at Howie Lemp.

"Talk to him," she said softly, her eyes shining. "The decision is for him to make, for I am his, body and soul!"

A dish of deviled eggs crashed to the floor with a loud clatter. A second later it was joined by the limp body of Howie Lemp!

WHEN Howie Lemp came around, he opened his eyes and discovered that he was resting against the luxurious cushions of a swiftly traveling limousine. Startled, he attempted to sit up, but a hand on each of his shoulders pushed him back against the cushions.

"Nothing to get excited about," a rumbling voice said.

Howie turned and saw "Stormy" Potterson on one side of him and a sharp-featured, snappily dressed middle aged man on the other. Both of the jump seats of the big car were occupied. One very fat man and one very skinny man had their backs to him.

"W—what's it all about?" Howie asked bewilderedly.

"You're a sly fox," Potterson laughed with false heartiness. "Getting a contract on that young lady in the drug store and now pretending you don't know what we want."

"What *do* you want?" Howie asked wildly.

"Don't get excited," Potterson said soothingly. "Our price will be the best you can get. After you fainted in the store the young lady disappeared in the crowd, but she had already told us that we had to deal through you. So that's what we're doing. Got your boarding house address from one of the clerks at the store and we're heading there now to draw up the papers. Just relax. We'll treat you right."

"You're all crazy," Howie said desperately, "I haven't any contract on anybody. Let me out of this car. I've got to get back to the store."

"I gotta hand it to you," Potterson chuckled, "you're going to keep up the act to the end aren't you? But we might as well put the cards on the

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table. You've got us over a barrel, I don't mind telling you. We've got to get that girl before Superba does. Why she'll be the most terrific thing that ever hit the picture business. We can't let her get away. So all you have to do is name the price and we'll meet it if we have to mortgage my false teeth to do it."

Howie stared about frantically. Was everybody going crazy? What had he done that deserved punishment like this? With every fibre of lanky body he longed for the orderly bustle of Rupp's Drug Store and the exhilarating presence of Mazie Slatter.

"You've got me all wrong," he managed to croak hoarsely, "I don't even know this girl you're raving about. I've only seen her twice."

Potterson smiled insinuatingly and nudged him in the side with his elbow.

"Okay, okay," he winked. "You've only seen her twice. But you managed to make a terrific impression in just that time." The smile faded from his face and was replaced with an expression of sulky envy. "I wish I knew what you had on the ball," he muttered.

"I wish I did too," Howie cried despairingly.

IN a few minutes the long sleek car drew to a smooth stop before the modest frame boarding house in which Howie lived. As they walked up the carpeted stairs to Howie's third floor room, he tried again.

"You men are wasting your time," he said pleadingly, "I can't give you any contracts or anything. I don't even know who or where this girl you want is."

"You hear that," Potterson said over his shoulder to the four men who followed him, "he doesn't know where she is."

The men chuckled.

"He probably can't even get in touch with her," Potterson added between panting breaths.

The men chuckled again.

Howie shrugged despairingly. Nothing he could say or do it seemed would convince him that he was telling the truth.

He stopped before his door, inserted the key and stepped back to allow Potterson and his four shadows to precede him into the room.

Howie followed them in, closed the door behind him and stopped short, his eyes popping open incredulously.

For reclining seductively on his bed like a contented leopard was the dark-haired nemessis who had so hopelessly scrambled up his life in the past hour. She had kicked off her high heeled pumps and now she wriggled her toes and glanced up at him through a strand of blue-black hair that had fallen over her eyes.

"Hello, honey," she cooed.

"W — what are you doing here?" gasped Howie.

Potterson took his eyes from the brunette reluctantly.

"Let's get down to business," he said drawing a sheaf of papers from his inner coat pocket. "We're prepared to go as high as necessary, so there shouldn't be any trouble."

Howie collapsed into a chair. Strangling sounds came from his throat.

The dark haired enchantress slipped gracefully from the bed and crossed to Howie and settled slinkily onto his lap. Her round white arm found its way around his neck, pulling him closer to her.

"Don't!" Howie strangled.

Potterson stared at him incredulously for a moment and then spread several impressive looking documents on a table next to the chair.

"A thousand a week to start," he said

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crisply, "with a raise each year for the duration of this seven-year contract. Satisfactory?"

"Please," Howie said miserably, "I'm not—"

"Okay," Potterson said hastily, "we'll make it two thousand to start with."

"But—"

"Four thousand!"

"Mr. Potterson," Howie said desperately, "this joke has gone far enough."

"Four thousand dollars a joke?" Potterson shouted. "I'll show you who's joking! Ten thousand dollars!"

HOWIE groaned. His resistance was gone. No one would listen to him. Everybody was insane. Nothing made sense any more. The only reason and sanity left in the world belonged to Mazie Slatter. And she would have none of him. He was dimly aware that they were shoving a pen into his hand, that he was signing documents by the dozen. But he was oblivious to it all. The only thought in his mind, the only desire in his heart was Mazie.

"There," Potterson cried triumphantly. "No one will ever break these contracts. They're iron-clad and air-tight. It'll cost us money, but it's worth it to have her under exclusive contract for everything."

"Brilliant work, Mr. Potterson," one of his shadows commented.

"Stroke of genius, sir," another added.

"Yes indeed," the remaining two put in simultaneously.

Howie was caught up then in a tornado of turbulent action and excitement.

"We leave for the coast in three hours," Potterson barked. "Be ready. We'll work out a complete build-up campaign in the meantime. Don't forget. Be at Union Station in three hours."

Howie tried feebly to protest, but the situation was out of his hands and control now. Hollywood methods were in the saddle. He was dragged to his feet, hustled to the car, raced from ticket agency to haberdasher and back again, with all the furious confusion of Hollywood itself.

The whole thing had become a kaleidoscopic nightmare in which pinwheels and pyrotechnics exploded constantly. In one interval of sanity he got away long enough to phone Rupp's Drug Store, but the clerk told him that Mazie Slatter had left the store and there was no way he could get in touch with her.

The papers had the story before they left. There were pictures of Potterson, Howie and all the yes men but not one single picture of the beautiful dark-haired girl. She was in the drawing room of the streamliner swathed to the ears in all-concealing veils. That was the build-up. She was heralded as the most glorious, glamorous, gorgeous creature ever to be signed by Colossal Films. But no pictures were to be taken until the dramatic unveiling at the depot in Hollywood. It was a dodge designed to create suspense and it was evidently succeeding. There were reams of copy about the mysterious veiled girl in the afternoon papers. And when the sleek streamliner pulled from the station hundreds of fans and curiosity seekers lined the tracks cheering and shouting.

Everyone was happy and excited and expectant but Howie. He sat glumly in his compartment feeling as if the bottom had dropped completely out of the safe, comfortable world he had known.

Just a few short hours ago he had been safe, secure and moderately happy. Now he was suddenly surrounded by a whirlpool of Hollywood maniacs

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and in the proximity of the glamorous, frightening dark-haired girl who acted toward him as if he were the personification of a hero from the pages of *Ideal Romances*.

As the wheels of the streamliner clicked swiftly over the rails bearing him inexorably toward his destiny in Hollywood, he wondered dazedly how it would all end . . .

TWO days later as the train was approaching the sprawling, stuccoed station at Los Angeles, Howie had found no answer to his gloomy speculations. He had spent the time in transit scampering from his compartment to the diner and back, furtively dodging the efforts of the bewitching brunette to inveigle him into her drawing room.

The door of his compartment suddenly banged open and Howie started furtively. But it was Potterson's moonlike face that appeared.

"Better be getting ready," he barked. "We're due in L.A. in about twenty minutes. I've just received word that the reception is all set to go off with a bang. We've got the mayor, dozens of stars and notables and half the town down at the station waiting for us. It'll be the biggest moment in the history of publicity build-ups when we unveil Collossal's latest star. I'm telling you the town will go wild. Now you get down to her drawing room and see that she's ready."

"But—"

"No 'buts'" Potterson snapped. With every foot that slid back under the wheels Potterson became more and more the infallible, dynamic Producer. He had on a brightly-checked sport coat and a crimson scarf which he wore like a uniform.

"Get moving," he ordered.

Reluctantly Howie got moving. As he reached the door to the brunette's drawing room he was aware that the palms of his hands were damp and cold.

Summoning all of his courage he knocked timidly. A lilting voice answered him and then the door was opened and the girl appeared.

Howie gaped. She was wearing a loose flowing white gown that blended with the creamy white of her skin and set off her dark hair stunningly. Standing before him, an inviting smile on her lips she looked like a sorceress of seduction.

"Just wanted to tell you," Howie gulped, "we're about there."

The girl reached out and took Howie's hand, drew him into the drawing room.

"Now just a minute," he spluttered, "I've—"

The girl closed the door after him, leaned against it, her head tilted back to expose the long column of her throat.

"You're always in such a hurry," she pouted. "But we can be together for these last few minutes anyway. You don't find it disagreeable being alone with me do you?"

Howie's will power was meeting its Waterloo. For three days he had been as noble as Galahad, but this provocative proximity was too much for him. Mazie receded into a vague blur in his consciousness.

Hardly knowing what he was doing he took the dark-haired girl into his arms and kissed her, thoroughly and completely. For a delirious instant the girl returned his embrace and it was like nothing he had ever known or dreamed in his life.

Then he got the surprise of his life!

For the girl suddenly and forcefully shoved him away, laughing gloatingly.

HOWIE staggered back and collapsed into a chair. He stared at

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her scornful features in silent, hurt amazement.

"You thought you could resist me," she blazed angrily. "No man in three thousand years has done that. But your indifference has been grossly insulting. For that insult you will pay dearly."

Howie stared at the girl, silent and stunned.

She seemed to be changing before his eyes. Her eyes were angry pools of smouldering flame and her features were hardening into a cold white mask of fury.

"W—who are you?" he quavered weakly.

"The *Leanhaun Shee!*" the word sounded like the hiss of a whip. "I live on love. My life is sustained by the devotion of men. Devotion that is as fatal to them as the sting of the adder. But I received one curse from my father that decrees that any man who resists me shall become my master. As long as you were indifferent to my charms I was your slave. Now, by your weakness and capitulation, you have become mine."*

"That's illegal," Howie said, desperately clutching at straws. "Lincoln abolished all that sort of stuff. You're—"

"Silence," the girl commanded. "Rise."

"N—no," Howie objected weakly.

"*Rise!*"

Howie stood up. He didn't want to, but some power other than his own trembling legs did the job for him.

"What do you want?" he stammered.

"Your love and your life," the Leanhaun Shee answered softly, moving toward him. "The only man who resisted me as long as you, was Marc Antony. I didn't mind that so much because he was occupied with Cleopatra and that was respectable competition even for me. But you, you sniveling worm, preferred that washed-out horror at the drug store to me. For that poor taste you will pay bitterly."

"No," Howie cried, backing from the creature.

She was growing taller before his eyes, it seemed. Her beauty was vanishing, and in its place a cold, ruthless passion was appearing. In the whiteness of her face her eyes were large saucers of violet flame.

"You are mine," she whispered.

In desperation Howie's distracted senses brought one name before his mind, forced one name through his terror-stiffened lips.

"Mazie!" he howled. "Mazie. Help me!"

As if this cry were the cue to invisible stage hands in invisible stage wings, the door to the drawing room was flung violently open and Mazie's lumpy, belligerent figure marched onto the scene.

NOTHING could have shocked Howie to a greater extent. His cry had been an instinctive, hopeless appeal and now, it was miraculously answered.

"Mazie," he choked, "save me."

Mazie surveyed the situation with a jealous glare.

"Like I thought," she snapped. "The minute my back is turned this thing," she paused to flick a contemptuous

*The Leanhaun Shee is a legendary Irish enchantress, who lives on love. Her very life and existence depend on love, and being loved. It is said that any man who loves her becomes her slave, and finally pays with his life for loving her—because she uses the life force that makes him live to sustain her own body! Thus, she steals, vampire-like, the life from her lovers and goes on living eternally. However, she too has a restriction, one that has never (say the legends) caused her any trouble: namely a curse placed on her by her own father that any man who could resist her charms would turn the tables on her, and she would become *his* slave.—Ed.

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glance at the dark-haired enchantress, "tries to steal you right from my arms."

The Leanhaun Shee was as still and silent as if she were carved from cold white marble. Only her eyes were alive and they were like the windows of hell.

"Tell her to go," she said tonelessly to Howie. "We are leaving."

"Oh, no you ain't," Mazie cried shrilly. "If you think I'm lettin' Howie slip away from me a second time you're nuttier than a fruit cake."

She wheeled to Howie.

"When I seen your pictures in the paper at home, telling about how you was to become a movie big-shot I suddenly realized that I was wrong about you. If I'd known that I would have gone to that show with you. I followed you to—to tell you that."

Howie was a simple soul and in his tormented state this sounded logical and—wonderful.

"Gosh," he said. "Would you, Mazie?"

"Sure, Honey," Mazie cooed. "You're just my type, Big Boy."

Howie clasped her to his breast fervently. With her in his arms he felt as strong as Hercules—or Mark Antony.

"Come!" the Leanhaun Shee said softly.

Howie wavered. Mazie snuggled her peroxided head closer to him.

"We're goin' to be awful happy out here," she sighed. "In pictures and everything."

"You bet we are," Howie said decisively. He felt as if he had emerged from a nightmare into a sane and sunny world again. He felt strong and sure of himself.

"Get out," he said to the Leanhaun Shee. "Can't you see we'd like to be alone?"

For a silent instant the Leanhaun Shee glared at him furiously. Then her expression softened. She shrugged her beautiful shoulders wearily.

"I must be slipping," she said thoughtfully. "When Marc turned back to Cleo, there was some excuse for it. But," she looked distastefully at the back of Mazie's streaky blonde head, "in this case there's no consolation for me at all. I might have known better than to choose a soda jerker, though."

With a quick angry motion she whipped the white gown about her shoulder, stepped back and—vanished!

HOWIE blinked his eyes incredulously. There was no doubt of it. She had disappeared as completely as a whiff of white smoke in a breeze.

But he had no time to wonder about that.

For an impatient fist was pounding on the door and a loud voice was demanding.

"Hurry up in there. We're waiting for you."

Howie recognized Potterson's voice with a chill start of terror.

The star, the Leanhaun Shee was gone. There was no one to take her place. His knowledge of the law was fuzzy, but he realized guiltily that he had signed contracts and legal documents guaranteeing the appearance of the glamorous brunette in pictures.

And she was gone. Vanished forever, he knew intuitively.

That was a relief, but what about the contracts he had signed? Panic mounted in his breast. He was out of one frying pan into another. As things stood, Potterson could throw him in the bastile and then throw the key away.

"Oooooh," he groaned.

"What's the matter?" Potterson yelled anxiously. "Anything wrong in there?"

It was then that the change came

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over Howie Lemp. His jaw hardened and his spine stiffened. For he suddenly though somewhat irrelevantly, remembered that he and Marc Antony had something in common. And no man with a kinship to a hero of Marc Antony's caliber can be bluffed by a simple matter of pulling a fullgrown and fullblown movie star from his sleeve.

"There's nothing wrong," he snapped, and there was new authority in his voice. "I'll—we'll be right with you."

THE band was playing "California Here I Come" and the depot was a noisy spectacle of cheering humans and gay bunting. Officials and dignitaries were present in droves. Flood lights flashed over the spectacular scene, picking out faces of famous stars and directors.

It was Hollywood at its colorful, sensational best.

"Stormy" Potterson was on the bunting-bedecked improvised stage finishing the speech of introduction.

". . . and so," he boomed, "we feel that tonight we are welcoming to our midst one who will speedily fulfill all of the glorious expectations we have for her. In my opinion this girl of beauty and charm and talent will take her place in stardom's uppermost niche. That is why it gives me such great pleasure to give to you, her very first audience, Colossal's future Star of Stars!"

A spotlight stabbed at the platform revealing in its bright glare a heavily-veiled figure. Applause broke out from all sides of the depot. It swelled up, higher and higher, then at a signal from Potterson it faded away to a tense expectant murmur.

With lumbering grace Potterson escorted the heavily draped figure to the edge of the stage, and with a solemnly dramatic gesture drew aside the veil and cast it to the floor.

And in the garish light of the stabbing beacon, Hollywood had its first introduction to the sallow face and streaky hair of Mazie Slatter!

A blanket of incredulous silence settled over the crowd.

And then as Mazie shook her hands over her head like a conquering fighter the storm broke.

Roaring, rocking waves of laughter surged up from the crowd completely drowning out Potterson's enraged bellow. It grew louder and more unrestrained by the second. Men clung to each other helplessly and some of them rolled to the floor, doubled up with merriment. It was a bedlam of buffoonery, an earthquake of mirth.

Off to one side of the howling, giggling crowd there was a lone, sad figure. Howie Lemp was not laughing.

IT HAD seemed like a good idea at the time to substitute Mazie for the exotic Leanhaun Shee, but things were not working quite as he had hoped. In fact things were terrible. And, he decided as he saw Potterson's huge figure lumbering toward him, they were destined to get much worse!

"I'll throw you in jail," Potterson was screaming. "I'll have you tarred and feathered, drawn and quartered, and flung to the buzzards. No man alive can do what you've done to me. Made me the laughing stock of the whole industry. Where is the girl? Where is she? If you don't produce Mazie Slatter, I'll have you hung for kidnaping."

"Mazie Slatter?" Howie echoed blankly. "That's Mazie Slatter on the platform."

"What are you trying to tell me?" Potterson was trembling like a tub of

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grape jelly in his rage. He whipped out papers from his inside pocket, jabbed a thick finger at the name signed to them. "It says right there in your handwriting. Mazie Slatter!"

Howie saw that Potterson was right and he realized at the same time what had happened. When he had signed the contract he had been thinking solely of Mazie and instinctively he had written her name into the document.

"And these contracts are air tight," Potterson bellowed over the noisy roars of the crowd.

"If you're trying to pull something, you're out of luck. You can't get out of these contracts."

Howie had been thinking swiftly and surely. His spine was stiffening again. Marc Antony was coming to the surface.

Suddenly he jabbed a bony finger into Potterson fat chest.

"You mean *you* can't get out of it," he snapped. "That girl on the platform is Mazie Slatter and you've signed her up for seven years. There's nothing about physical descriptions in that contract. If you want to go to court, we will prove that Mazie Slatter has been Mazie Slatter for the past twenty-eight years and that you signed her as such."

"It's a trick," Potterson howled, "a gyp. I won't stand for it. I want the girl, the dark-haired beautiful girl I saw in the drug store. Where is she? I don't want Mazie Slatter, if that's Mazie Slatter on the platform."

He stared frantically over the crowd, listening to their wild hysterical laughter. He turned back to Howie shuddering.

"You hear that?" he demanded shrilly. "I'm ruined. I'll be the biggest joke in pictures."

"No you won't!" Howie barked. He grabbed Potterson by both arms, jerked him around. "Listen to me. Forget about the other girl, you'll never see her again. You've got something better than just a good looker." He swung Potterson around to face the screaming, hilarious mob. "You've got a comedienne!" he shouted. "Look at that crowd. They love her. They're laughing themselves sick at her, but they're enjoying themselves like kids at a circus."

"What about my publicity campaign?" Potterson moaned. "I've built this girl up as the most beautiful creature in the world. I can't get out of that. I'm through, ruined."

"No," Howie said firmly, "you're not."

He took a deep breath. A man with will power enough to play in the same league with Marc Antony can rise to occasions.

"Let me handle things," he said with quiet authority.

HE DID. With what was called a brilliant stroke of genius, he transformed Mazie Slatter into one of the greatest natural comediennes the screen has ever produced. And that was the start of Howie's meteoric rise to the head of Colossal Films.

Now he's happily married to Mazie. But he gets almost as much happiness from his hobby, which is collecting busts of Marc Antony. He has sixteen of them now in his office.

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The LIVING MANIKINS

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By David Wright O'Brien

All over the department store the lights went on—and with them the manikins came to life; and Hempstead's troubles began!

"WHAT this store needs," thundered Napoleon B. Dribble somewhat hoarsely, "is a new broom, a new leaf, new angles!"

While Napoleon B. Dribble paused to mop his fat head with an imported linen handkerchief, Hugo Hempsted wondered vaguely if this were the thirty-fourth or thirty-fifth time his employer had run the gamut of those phrases during the five-hour conference. But now Mr. Dribble was clearing his throat raggedly and plunging onward.

"We need brains, reorganization, efficiency," Mr. Dribble declared.

Hugo knew that this meant the axe for a hundred or so employees the following day. But he was weary enough to hope that he might be one of them. By now he was keenly regretting his choice to the Employee's Committee of

Hugo Hempstead reached out a trembling hand toward the master fuse-box switch

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Ten. At first, when word had come to him that he'd been selected to represent the workers in the store at the all-important conference, Hugo had been both frightened and flattered. The choice of the Employee's Committee of Ten had been made by Napoleon B. Dribble, personally. But by now Hugo was fatigued and fed-up.

For he knew why the Great Man had chosen him.

Napoleon B. Dribble was proud of his reputation for man-to-man square dealing with his employees. It was Mr. Dribble's constant assertion that the employees were the backbone of the store. They had a right, he also asserted monotonously, to have a voice in any matters that vitally affected the store. And so when such matters arose —as in tonight's board meeting—Mr. Dribble selected a committee of ten employees to represent their fellows.

And his personal selections from the rank and file—Hugo was now disgustingly aware—invariably resulted in nominating a man like Hugo, and nine similarly spineless saps. The committee of ten employees was not expected to contribute to such conclaves; it was rather permitted to watch silently as the board of directors aired the discussions.

Now, looking at the nine fellow employees who sat with him at the wrong end of the long table, Hugo was aware that his particular committee of ten had filled in admirably all evening, presenting a solid block of awed silence.

Hugo realized that he would not exactly relish the spot of leaping to his feet and arguing with those board of director bigwigs himself. Not that he was a Caspar Milquetoast. No, he wasn't the quailing type of some of the other employees sitting there with him. He was merely a fairly intelligent, not overly ambitious, plain young man who had sense enough to keep his mouth shut when it was expected of him. Napoleon B. Dribble must have been aware of this when he picked Hugo.

But by now he was exceedingly tired, and thinking woefully of the fact that he'd have to be behind his necktie counter in another four hours while the entire board of directors, including Dribble, would be climbing into mauve pajamas and soft beds.

Hugo thought of several rather startling tricks he could pull to bring this thing to a close. But a job being a job, Hugo discarded these ideas and went on listening to Mr. Dribble.

"I have facts and figures," Mr. Dribble rasped like a basso file, "which will show you why our sales have declined." He fished into the inner pocket of his expensively tailored coat.

Hugo thought his head would burst if he had to hear any more facts and figures.

"These figures—" Mr. Dribble repeated, still fishing in his pocket. "These figures" he paused again, face perplexed. "Drat it," he exclaimed, "where in the blazes did I leave those papers?"

Hugo smiled happily. Maybe they would be spared the figures.

The look of consternation on the face of Napoleon B. Dribble melted into one of executive enlightenment.

"Harrrumph," he snorted. "Of course. Back in my desk in the office. That's where I left them." He peered commandingly down at the wrong end of the table where the Employee's Committee of Ten sat looking noncommital.

"Mr. Hempsted, old chap," Mr. Dribble rasped unexpectedly. He always added the "old chap" stuff when throwing his weight around with an underling. "I wonder if you'd be good enough to hop into a cab and run over to my office in the store to get those

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papers. They're in the top drawer, and we'll probably be needing them before the session here is finished."

Hugo felt all eyes turning in his direction. He felt himself coloring. What the hell, he told himself, he wasn't a messenger boy. *Tell him you're not a messenger boy, Hugo,* an inner voice demanded. *Get up on your pins and growl back!*

He got up on his pins, head lowered in deferential modesty.

"Yes, Mr. Dribble," Hugo heard himself saying, "I'll be glad to." He was already excusing his conscience by telling himself that a free ride in a taxi was not to be sniffed at. . . .

TWENTY MINUTES later Hugo dismissed the cab driver, and turned to march up to one of the side doors of the vast imposing structure which was Dribble's Department Store.

Hoping that he wouldn't be shot by the night watchman, he clicked around with the lock for a moment, and finally the door opened. Hugo took the precaution of locking the door behind him. Then he turned into the darkness, facing the vast jumble of aisles and show cases that were the main floor of the store.

Involuntarily, Hugo shivered. It was gloomy dark, and the white sheets covering the cases off the deserted aisles added to the generally ghostly impression of the place. Quite a different joint, Hugo realized, from the bustling bee hive of commerce it resembled in the daytime.

Hugo started down the center aisle, moving cautiously for fear of tripping over an unforeseen object. Vaguely, he wondered where in the blazes the night watchman was sleeping.

A tiny icicle of excitement trickled down Hugo's spine, and he smiled half fearfully. This was far more invigorating than the stuffy, overheated, boresome conference room. His sleepiness was vanishing.

The rigid, unnaturally posed figures of the display manikins stationed approximately one every third aisle added to the eerieness of the place. Now and then Hugo found himself peering up at the bathrobed statue of a young man, or the be-corseted figure of a smiling rigidly posed middle-aged woman. Most of these figures were as familiar to him as his fellow employees, for he was surrounded by the same manikins every day. But they looked different now. Possibly because of the lack of lighting. They seemed, incongruously enough, much more alive by night than by day.

Hugo smiled, feeling pleasantly frightened. He'd really have a tale to pass around his department the following morning. He moved on, passing the moustached manikin posed with a golf club over a golf ball in the sporting goods section. The moustached manikin wore hideous salmon-colored plus fours. Idiotically, Hugo had the impression that he was too intent on the club in his hands and the ball at his feet to look up as Hugo passed.

Again trickles of excitement touched Hugo's spine.

He moved even more slowly, now, for he was passing the Gentleman's Game Room section. He knew from memory that it was cluttered up with portable bars, roulette tables, deep leather arm chairs, and similar sundry accessories. One of the arm chairs, just directly ahead in the gloom, contained the manikin figure of a pink-cheeked, clubbish looking old gentleman dressed in tweeds—his fixed smile advertising the solid comfort afforded by the chair in which he'd been placed.

The smiling, seated, pink-cheeked manikin had always seemed a trifle foolish to Hugo. If people wanted to

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initiate themselves into the comfort of a chair it seemed damn silly to plunk a plaster-of-paris manikin down in it to prevent customers from trying the thing out.

He shook his head, stepping around the chair and the manikin reposing in same.

And at that instant hell broke loose for Hugo Hempstead; hell in the form of a vast, blinding, electrical explosion that threw Dribble's Department Store into a great orange burst of light and knocked Hugo flat on his face to the floor. And during the endless split-second that followed, Hugo lay there stunned and dazed, while the orange blaze of light readjusted itself to a glow of normal proportions and a hand shook Hugo gently by the shoulder. A voice was ringing in his ears. . . .

CHAPTER II

An Impossible Happening

"I SAY, old boy," the voice was repeating like a broken gramaphone. "I say, old boy," it inquired, "are you all right?" And then Hugo, before he could answer, felt strong hands grab him around the middle and lift him to his feet.

Hugo stood erect, swaying groggily for a moment while he realized through the confusion that the lights of Dribble's Department Store were all burning brightly. Then there was that voice again, filled with polite, anxious concern.

"Are you all right, old boy?"

Hugo turnd to face the solicitous voice of his benefactor. He replied automatically as he did so.

"Sure," Hugo said, "I'm all right now. It was just a—" and the sentence froze right there. Hugo's jaws fell slack in wild astonishment. The speaker standing before him was a pink-cheeked, clubbish looking, tweed clad old gentleman—a person distinctly similar in appearance to the manikin who sat in the chair.

Hugo's gaze shot to the chair. The manikin no longer sat in it. His eyes flew wildly around the chair, then back to the person confronting him. *There was no doubt about it. The manikin who'd been seated comfortably in the leather chair—the inanimate statue of plaster-of-paris—was now standing before him inquiring about his health!*

Hugo Hempstead's mouth flew open, but no words issued. In the back of his throat a startled scream of sheer gibbering terror fought to be heard. But even that was drowned in a gurgle.

"Ugh!" said Hugo Hempstead.

"Indian moccasins are on the third floor," said the manikin courteously. "Beads and feathers on the ninth." He chuckled at his little jest. "I hope you feel all right, old boy," he started politely again.

Hugo's voice had failed him, but his legs didn't. He turned, bolting down the aisle like the proverbial bat out of hell. Hugo ran wildly, sobbingly, blindly, like a crying child. He didn't hear the pink-cheeked manikin's amused chuckling fading behind him. He didn't hear anything, in fact, until he reached the Model Home.

There, darting into its first floor precincts with the instincts of an animal dashing to its lair, Hugo hurtled into the living room of the Model Home, turned and frantically bolted the door behind him. He wheeled, then, and made a terror-stricken dive behind a display sofa in the far corner of the room. And as Hugo hurled himself behind the sofa he suddenly found himself in a tangle of legs and arms and perfume and squeals. The behind-the-sofa refuge, he realized as he scram-

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bled around in an effort to get to his feet, had been occupied by another person, and that person was a girl!

FOR an instant Hugo forgot the frenzied fright that had driven him here. And for another instant he gazed bewilderedly down on the slim figure of the blonde girl on whom he had so unceremoniously dumped himself. She was climbing to her feet, white-faced and shaken with fright.

"All right," said the blonde girl—and Hugo's memory of the last few minutes deserted him long enough to allow him to realize that she was exceedingly pretty—gazing fearfully at Hugo. "All right, I'll explain everything!"

Hugo opened and closed his mouth, but no words came forth. He was torn by three primal instincts. Curiosity bade him stay there with the girl and find out what this was all about. Fear urged him to get the hell behind the concealing safety of the sofa. Self-preservation demanded that he do likewise. But the girl was very pretty, and Hugo was inordinately curious. Besides, her very presence seemed to make his other fears seem trivial.

"Who are you?" Hugo blurted swiftly, his instinct of self-preservation giving 'way before the urgings of curiosity.

The blonde girl—and the precocious side of Hugo told him that she had the face of a lovely woodland elf—gulped and replied. "My name is Judy Carmody. My father is Michael Carmody. He's the night watchman at the store here."

"Where is he?" Hugo demanded, "I have to find him." He was suddenly pressed by fear again. "There's something strange going on in this store that—"

The girl seemed on the verge of crying.

"That's just it," she broke in. "Daddy was so sick tonight that he couldn't come down to the store. But if he didn't show up, Mr. Dribble would fire him. Mr. Dribble can't stand sickness in his employees. So I took a wild chance and got Daddy's keys and came down to try to work his shift through for him."

Hugo's eyebrows lifted, digesting this information.

"You mean—" he began.

Judy Carmody broke in once more. "Yes, I've been here since midnight. The other watchman always leaves a little before twelve, and so when I took over the shift there was no one around to notice the difference." Her voice was now definitely shaky. "And it all would have gone through all right, except that this has happened!" Twin tear drops edged her blue eyes.

"This?" Hugo asked. "What do you mean, this?"

"The noise. I heard a noise. Obviously you made it," the girl said. "But it frightened me so I ran to the central alarm box and switches. I wanted to pull the police alarm, but I guess all I did was turn the lights of the store on instead."

Hugo remembered the stunning blast of electricity that had signaled the lighting up of the store.

"You certainly did," he said reflectively.

And then his recollection of the incident that followed the lighting of the store returned to him. Cold sweat broke out on his brow, and he clapped his hand to his mouth.

"My God," he muttered strickenly, "I'd forgotten the damned manikin!" As he spoke he shot a glance over his shoulder. The door to the living room of the Model Home was still securely locked as he had left it. No one seemed to be breaking it down at the moment.

Judy Carmody was looking at him as if he were a trifle mad.

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"What's wrong?" she inquired. Hugo's fright seemed to calm her down a great deal.

Hugo looked at Judy.

"I don't know if I should tell you. You'll think me mad," he hesitated.

Judy Carmody's gaze became cool and commanding.

"Tell me," she ordered. "I've cried on your shoulder, now you use mine. Incidentally," she concluded, "who are you?"

"I'm Hugo Hempsted. But that is neither here nor there," Hugo said hurriedly. "The point is this." His tone lowered to a stage whisper. *"There is something strange going on in the store!"*

AND then Hugo breathlessly recounted what had happened to him after the lights went on. Being a thorough young man, Hugo had included a mention of his mission in the store, plus an explanation of the board meeting, and finally, a lurid description of the manikin who accosted him. Judy heard this out. Then she stepped very close to him until her face was a scant three inches from his own.

"Breathe," commanded Judy Carmody. Hugo breathed. She stepped back, shaking her head. "No, you haven't been drinking," she decided. Her eyes appraised him curiously. Then she said, "You won't tell a soul about my filling in in Daddy's place, will you?"

Hugo swore to everlasting secrecy. Then Judy said,

"Well then, Daddy's not out of his job yet, and if you'll help me turn those lights off again, I'll go down with you to investigate the walking manikin you saw. It's as much to my advantage to know about any strange doings in this store as it is to you."

For just an instant Hugo eyed the safety and concealment of the place behind the sofa a bit wistfully. Then, with the girl beside him to stiffen his backbone, he made a brave effort at a jaunty smile.

"Very well," he said. "Let's find that light switch, then we'll look into my optical illusion about the manikin."

He stepped over to the door which he'd locked minutes before, and opened the latch with a slight flourish of bravado.

"Well," said Judy Carmody, "open the door."

Hugo opened the door. A welter of sound poured in on them from the aisles of Dribble's Department Store. Sound that could only be voices raised in excitement and laughter. Many, many voices.

Judy Carmody was at Hugo's shoulder, and together they both stared out into the now life-packed aisles of the store. Dribble's Department Store was swarming with very much alive male and female manikins!

A slight screech caught in Hugo's throat, and he made a wild effort to slam the door shut again. But Judy Carmody had her hand on his arm, preventing retreat.

"That's not going to do us any good," she said. Her voice, though shocked and stunned, was under excellent control. Hugo looked wildly down at the girl and found reassurance in her eyes.

"But it was right," Hugo almost screamed. "The damned manikin *wasn't* any hallucination. Now *all* the manikins are alive!"

"They certainly don't look dangerous," Judy Carmody observed, still dumbfounded, but striving desperately to be matter-of-fact.

Hugo considered this.

"But they just can't be alive!" His face was sickly white and he gasped for breath like a beached salmon.

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"Look for yourself," Judy said pointedly. "Then stop denying it. My grandfather," she observed reminiscently, "used to believe in leprechauns. A smart man, my grandfather."

"But clothing dummies aren't leprechauns!" Hugo almost screeched.

"No," the girl agreed. "But these are certainly live dummies."

OVER the babble of voices there was a sudden tremendous crash. Hugo looking wildly in the direction of the noise, saw the figure of the golfer in the sporting goods sections. The one with the salmon-colored plus fours who held a driver in his hands and bent over a golf ball.

Evidently, the golfer had just come to life. For he'd belted the ball before him with beautiful fairway form, and the white pellet had whistled upward—smashing the gigantic many-faceted chandelier which hung in the center of the main floor of the store.

That, Hugo saw, had been the reason behind the tremendous crash. And now the golfer was stepping down from his roost and joining the happy throngs of manikins parading around the aisles.

"Ohhhhh," Hugo moaned. "This is terrible. This is horrible. Mr. Dribble will put me in the penitentiary when he sees this!"

"Get a grip on yourself," Judy Carmody told him sharply. "I'm just as much in a spot over this as you are. If we can't straighten this thing out, then I'll go to prison also, and Daddy'll lose his job."

Hugo felt suddenly ashamed of himself. The calm of the girl had steadied him. And now his jaw set resolutely.

"You're right," he agreed. "It won't do us any good to argue the why and wherefore of this utter impossibility. It's happened, and that's all there is to it. Now we'll have to settle this mess, somehow."

"That's better," Judy Carmody said. She still had her hand on his arm. "Come on, let's dig into the job of cleaning this up!"

They started forward. Evidently the awakening of the clothing dummies throughout the store was taking place gradually, for even as Hugo's eyes flew wildly around the scene, he could see other manikins moving down from the perches they'd occupied for advertising purposes.

CHAPTER III

Chaos

A SUDDEN flurry of motion from the huge display perch in the Women's Sportswear section caused Hugo's eyes to pop out. The most celebrated of women's displays was the scene depicted by the red-coated, derbied woman—a manikin of course—who sat sartorially clad for hunting astride a huge stuffed white horse. At the feet of the horse—adding splendid realism—had been placed two dogs. And as a final touch to the tableau, a stuffed fox had been placed some three yards ahead of huntress, horse, and dogs.

And now, Hugo knew from the terrible neighing and sudden barking, the entire dummied scene was coming alive. The huntress, astride her stirring mount, looked around and hollered.

"Haloooooo," cried the huntress, "tally hoooooo!"

The dogs gave final yips, then, as if shot from guns, leaped out after the fox. The fox, frightened and keeping quite in the bounds of his role, looked once over his shoulder and lit out in flight. The huntress and her horse, leaping thunderously down from the big display perch, gave chase.

"Oh Lord," Hugo groaned despair-

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ingly, as the whole mad pursuit swept cyclonically through the aisles. "Oh Lord!" The huntress was making a splendid job of taking the show cases as hurdles. They all disappeared around a far turn at the end of the main aisles. But the cry of the huntress still came faintly to them.

"Hallooooooo! Tallyhooooooooo!"

Hugo and Judy were moving through the aisles now, passing painted mouthed clothing dummies on every side. The dummies smiled and nodded, and went on about their conversation with other manikins.

"How will we get to the bottom of this?" Hugo cried. "Where on earth do we begin?"

Suddenly Hugo blushed furiously as a voluptuous young female manikin clad only in a girdle hipped smilingly past. Another glance showed Hugo that the manikin he'd first seen in the Gentleman's Game Room section—the pink-cheeked, tweed clad, middle-aged chap—was following close on the heels of the voluptuous young wench, his round red features wreathed in a devil-may-care smile.

"Some bunch," Judy observed as she saw the deep flush grow more solidly over Hugo's cheeks.

Then Hugo saw something that made him grow weak inside. A dapper, moustached male manikin—Hugo knew him to be from a display in the neckwear section—had taken his place behind a jewelry counter and was serving a clamoring mass of pulchritudinous female dummies.

"Good heavens!" Hugo gurgled, grabbing Judy by the arm. "That fellow's handing out a stock of the store's most expensive jewels!"

Half dragging Judy, he dashed over to the counter. Angrily, he confronted the moustached manikin from the neckwear section.

"Here!" Hugo cried. "Here, stop that at once, you fool!"

The dapper, moustached manikin turned and smiled.

"Hello, Hugo," he said. "What brings you here at this hour of the morning?"

HUGO was somewhat taken aback that the dummy should know his name. But then he realized that the animated creature was from the same section in which he worked, and had probably stood on his perch for months hearing Hugo's name used.

"Stop it," Hugo repeated. "Stop it this instant!"

"Go away," the moustached young clothing dummy said pleasantly. "I'm getting a name for myself."

"You're giving away store property," Hugo stormed. "That's the same as stealing." His sense of justice was so outraged that he totally forgot the fact that he was addressing anyone but an ordinary mortal such as himself.

"Take it out of the back wages that old Dribble owes me," the moustached manikin said cheerfully.

"Back wages?" Hugo screamed. "Back wages? Why, you aren't even an employee here. You're just a manikin, a display dummy. You aren't even human."

"That's what all you people think," the dummy countered, flashing his handsome smile. "Humans have no consideration for anyone but themselves. No, go away and don't bother me!" He winked at a brunettte.

Hugo shuddered.

"All these people, running around creating havoc. How long do you think this can go on?" Hugo demanded.

"As long as we like it to," the moustached manikin countered. "Now go find a corner and lie down." He held out an expensive diamond bracelet to the brunette dummy. "Try this for size,

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darling," he said leeringly. "They should never have put you to modeling aprons. From now on your place will be here, wearing some of this lovely ice."

Hugo started to say something else, but Judy grabbed his arm.

"Come on," she told him, "you won't get any sense out of that plaster-of-paris wolf."

"But Judy," Hugo protested, unconsciously using her first name, "we have to do something about this!"

"But there's nothing that can be done here," the girl answered. "We'll have to look further on. Maybe we'll get some ideas."

"I've got too many ideas already," Hugo began despairingly. "Ideas about what old Dribble will say when he fi—"

"Hallloooooo! Talllyyyyhooooooo!"

The manikins at the counter, Hugo, Judy, and the moustached dummy from the neckwear section all looked up at once. A small brown fox flew over a counter, through their midst, and high-tailed on.

Dogs barked, and in an instant were leaping up over the manikins at the diamond counter and onward in pursuit of the fox. By now all had sensibly dropped flat on the floor. And just in time, for the huntress, astride her white horse, just cleared the counter on the opposite side of the aisle. And now, with a second gigantic leap, her mount soared over the diamond counter, hooves whistling past Hugo's bent head. A moment later and huntress and mount had disappeared after the fox and dogs.

The group around the diamond counter picked itself up from the floor. Hugo, holding fast to Judy's arm, bent his head close to the sweet scent of her blonde hair and asked,

"Are you all right?"

She nodded.

"I'm fine, Hugo." It was the first time she'd used his name. "Let's get away from here, though. We're not getting anywhere, and time is wasting."

AT HER last sentence, Hugo glanced hastily at his watch. It was six-thirty. In another two hours the store would be opening. And in another two hours Napoleon B. Dribble would be in charge of a special brigade of police whose one task would be to put Hugo Hempsted into a prison cell for the rest of his life—if something weren't done about this situation pretty quickly.

But a quick glance at Judy Carmody gave Hugo a swift, strangely unexpected sort of courage. And for a fleeting instant he wondered what it was about the girl that made him feel everything would work out for the best so long as she was by his side.

"You're right," Hugo said. "We've got to get around and size this situation up. If we find out how it ticks and why, we'll be much closer to stopping the clock on this madness." He piloted Judy along by the arm.

Hugo was doing some thinking. Just about the fastest thinking he had ever been called on to do in his life. It occurred to him that even though he'd fail to bring Napoleon B. Dribble's papers back to the board meeting, his absence wouldn't be noticed. Mr. Dribble really didn't need the papers anyway. His sending a messenger to get them—a messenger in the form of one of his employees—was more than likely just a gesture to show authority and a mystical importance.

Now that that problem was off his mind, Hugo felt a little bit better. Whether he cleaned up this mess before the store opened or not, he would at least have approximately two hours in which to go about the job undisturbed. And as for interference and possible

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detection from anyone other than Mr. Dribble, Hugo felt no fear. As long as the manikins stayed within the reservation—so to speak—the fact that the store lights blazed merrily would not attract any undue outside attention. For after all, many such large establishments held all night inventory checkings. Observers outside the store would more than likely think that Dribble & Company was holding an all-night inventory.

Hugo, feeling better than he'd felt since his discovery of the pink-cheeked manikin in the arm chair, looked protectingly down at Judy.

"Don't worry, Judy," he said. "We've got two hours time. A lot can happen in two hours. Your Daddy's job is as safe as gold. We'll clean everything up."

The girl slipped her hand into his for an instant. Hugo could recall other girls having acted similarly. But he couldn't remember any so pretty as Judy. He felt a new flood of self-confidence.

"I won't worry, Hugo," Judy told him. "We'll figure this out."

CHAPTER IV

"Call the Cops!"

THE APPRAISAL of the situation took longer than Hugo and Judy had at first imagined it would. As a matter of fact, it wasted half an hour of their precious one hundred and twenty minutes. And worse than that, it left them filled with fear and frustration, and a realization of the futility of the task that confronted them.

Dribble's Department Store was a tornado of madness. In the Model Home—which they had just left fifteen minutes before—a wild party had now started. Manikins pranced and cavorted to the music furnished from the Radio and Phonograph sections, and their giddy whirlwind of excitement was stirred to a pitch closer and closer to frenzy thanks to constant raids of the Liquor section.

On the Ski Slide, the prize exhibit of the tenth floor, Hugo and Judy had been shocked, then terrified, as the manikin—dressed out for a winter at Sun Valley—suddenly came to life and whipped wildly down the great slide, out over the rows of counters, and finally saved pseudo-life and plaster-of-paris limbs by a fortunate landing atop the canvas netting of a big tent in the Camping section.

And then there was the especially voluptuous wench in the Men's Apparel section. She was clad in the very briefest of scanties—Hugo knew her to be a refugee from the Lingerie section—and she insisted on stretching her more than lovely self atop a woodsy campfire display.

"I'd much rather be here," she'd giggled at Hugo's protests, "than back in the stuffy old Ladies Lingerie section. Down there I'm just a pair of pants and a brassiere. But up here in the Men's Apparel, Wow!" She punctuated the idea she was conveying with a wink at Hugo. Judy led Hugo quickly out of there.

And as their frantic tour continued, everything grew steadily worse. Several plaster-of-paris legs were caught in the escalator, and the owners of said appendages had halted the moving stairs until they could regain the various parts of their bodies. There was much loud and drunken quarreling over this, since the wrong limbs went to the wrong people. One old dowager type manikin from the Stoutish Matron's section, for example, walked off with a trim pair of limbs belonging to a young cutie who dummied in the Debutante section.

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Before Hugo could carry out his impulse to settle the dispute, Judy took his arm once more and steered him away from the escalators. But by this time the formerly cheerful let's-dig-in expression which Hugo had worn was now melted to one of growing despair.

And so it went through the rest of the inspection. A sleek, handsome young manikin—clad in a snappy pair of bathing trunks—was found loitering conspicuously around the Debutante section, seeking a perch on which to pose. Hugo and Judy didn't stop to ask him, but his reasons for trading the boredom of the Sports section were probably similar to those of the young voluptuous dummy who'd fled the Ladies' Lingerie for the Men's Apparel section. Hugo contented himself with shaking his head in anguished disapproval at this.

FINALLY, in a secluded section of the main floor stock room, Hugo and Judy faced each other to discuss the situation.

"I'm all for getting out of here, Judy," Hugo declared in bitter anguish. "We haven't a chance in the world to restore things to what they once were. Good Lord, there's only an hour and a half left. Then everybody'll be coming into the store, including Dribble himself, and we'll be—"

"I know," Judy cut in. "It looks pretty grim. But we won't lose anything by trying the scheme I have in mind."

"Scheme?" Hugo bleated the word hopefully. "What scheme?"

"Using law and order to bring them to our way of thinking," the girl said excitedly. "It should be worth a chance, anyway."

"Law and order?" Hugo was now completely baffled. "But we can't call in the police. Why they'd throw us both in the peni—"

"Not the real police," Judy cut him short. "Dummy police. Manikin police. They'd have much more effect controlling manikins than a human police force would have."

Hugo was still bewildered.

"That's all very nice," he said, puzzled. "Very nice. But where are we to get hold of a Manikin police force?"

"That's up to you," Judy said.

"Up to me?" Hugo pointed a finger at his chest to emphasize his protestation. "Why up to me? I cou—"

"You can try to recall," Judy declared, "on just what floor your store has that exhibit with the big sign saying 'Stop! Have You Forgotten Anything?'."

Hugo's eyebrows showed that a light was dawning.

"I know the one you mean," he said excitedly. "There's a dummy figure of a policeman with his hand upraised and a whistle in his mouth, right under the 'Stop!' sign!"

"That's the one," Judy exclaimed. "I remembered seeing it, but I wasn't certain that it was in Dribble's!"

"That's on the tenth floor," Hugo said. "It's up in the Tire and Auto Accessories section. Come on!" He grabbed her hand and dashed toward an elevator.

On the tenth floor Hugo brought the elevator to a smooth stop and opened the doors.

"I started in Dribble's running one of these things," he remarked. "I didn't realize it then, but it was a better job than the one I have now."

They were moving down the aisles along the tenth floor. There were no manikins cluttering up this floor, however, inasmuch as the only excuse Napoleon B. Dribble could find for inserting one into the auto accessories section was in the "Stop!" sign display.

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Hugo spied a blue uniform wandering aimlessly about the counters at the far end.

"There he is," Hugo shouted. "The cop manikin. We're in luck!"

"And don't think we can't use a little luck right now," Judy declared.

But Hugo was running ahead, toward the figure of the cop manikin.

"Hey!" he shouted. "Hey there, Officer!" The ridiculousness of addressing a dummy so respectfully didn't occur to him at the moment.

"Hey!" Judy was shouting now, too. "Hey, Mister policeman!"

THE blue uniformed figure stopped. Then it turned to face Hugo and Judy who were now less than five yards away.

"Sure now," said the cop manikin—and Hugo had time to observe that his appearance was so cleverly modeled that he looked more genuine than a real policeman— "Sure now, would you people be reporting a crime to me?" There was wistful, somewhat eager, hope in his voice.

"We're reporting some rioting, a whole store full of it," Judy said breathlessly.

The manikin policeman seemed infinitely pleased.

"Now," he smiled, "that's fine. That's splendid. And where is this rioting?"

"Here," Hugo broke in. "Right here in Dribble's Department Store."

The manikin cop lifted his nightstick tenatively.

"Wonderful," he said eagerly. "Then I'll be able to use this. After all those years." He brandished the nightstick menacingly now. "You've no idea," he said, suddenly off on a tangent, "how terrible it's been just standing up there on me perch, holding this club, never being able to take a whack at anyone with it."

Hugo looked at the thick nightstick and paled slightly.

"So long as you don't use it too enthusiastically," he said, "we won't mind."

The dummy policeman smiled. He had fat red cheeks and bushy black eyebrows.

"Now tell me where them thrubble makers is," he said, "and I'll—I'll attind to the rioting. Probably communists."

"Just a minute," Judy broke in. "We've more to tell you about it, too. We don't want them merely stopped. We want them brought together for a sort of, ah, well, night court. Here's what I mean." And then, rapidly, she outlined her plans while the manikin cop bent a professionally attentive ear.

Hugo stood there listening, and marveling. . . .

CHAPTER V

The Law to the Rescue

IT WAS half an hour later, or, precisely, one hour before the store was due to open, that Hugo, Judy, and the manikin cop stood atop the central counters in the main aisle of the Dribble Department Store and gazed down at the sheepishly assembled crowd of some hundred and eighty manikins.

The manikin cop's work had been stupendous, and effective. By an uncompromising use of his club and his vocal muscles he had combed the store from top to bottom, routing his rioting fellow-dummies and herding them sternly down to this impromptu night court.

There was a great deal of surly muttering, and numerous growling protests from the group, but the fact remained that they had all been quailed by brusquely administered authority.

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Where they would have blandly disregarded the minions of J. Edgar Hoover, or even the notorious O.G.P.U., the manikins were as docile sheep before the commands of law enforcement issuing from one of their own kind. Judy's idea had been a corker.

The manikin cop was obviously pleased with his work.

"There they are, Miss," he said to Judy, "ready and waiting fer any words you might have to say to them. And if any of them so much as act up even a little, I'll give 'em this!" He indicated his nightstick.

Judy smiled sweetly at him, while Hugo felt a swift ridiculous surge of jealousy toward the manikin cop. She shook her long blond hair back from her shoulders.

"Rap with your nightstick for attention, Mr. Policeman," Judy commanded.

The manikin cop pounded so hard on a counter top that it almost splintered under the force of the blows. But it had its effect, for immediately the mutterings ceased.

"Now then," Judy suddenly nudged Hugo in the ribs with her very lovely elbow, "step out and give 'em the devil, Hugo."

Hugo was startled. He had been more or less expecting Judy to carry her own idea through with her own action. The resolute calm and confident determination of the girl had caused him subconsciously to lean on her for strength and support during the last hour. Now she was turning the mess over to him, smilingly, and with great expectations.

Hugo reddened. To use a bromide, he was quite unacquainted with the art of public speaking—especially before a surly crowd of department store dummies. He cleared his throat.

"Fellow dumm—" he began, then suddenly felt like biting his tongue off. Behind him, he heard Judy titter. He started afresh. "Manikins of Dribble's Department Store," he said.

"Louder," shouted a rude dummy in the back.

Hugo's face was now the color of a lobster.

"We've brought you all here," he continued uncomfortably, "to see if there isn't something we can do to get you back to where you belong. That is, I mean—" he was floundering miserably now.

"Not that way," Judy hissed behind him. "Be firm. Don't ask. Demand. Push 'em around!"

Hugo cleared his throat again.

"Look here," he suddenly blurted savagely. "This can't go on. We've got to have an end to it, here and now!" He swung his right arm high to emphasize his statement.

"Bravo!" Judy hissed. "That's the stuff!"

Encouraged, Hugo barged on.

"Who do you think you are?" he demanded. "What sort of nonsense do you think we'll tolerate around this store?"

"Whom," the heckling manikin in the back shouted, "do we think we are? If you can't use correct English, get down off of there."

HUGO spotted the heckler as a manikin from the Books section. The red-faced old dummy that had always been on exhibit before a phony fireplace, curled up in a sofa with a book.

"Shut up back there!" Judy shouted. She turned to the manikin cop. "Go down there and hit him on the head," she demanded. The cop obligingly leaped down from the platform and started back around to the rear of the crowd. "Go ahead," Judy urged Hugo, "don't let them heckle you."

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Hugo was doing some fast thinking. He was thinking of the board meeting which he'd deserted a few hours back. He was thinking of the Employee's Committee of Ten of whose ranks he had been a member. He was thinking of the huge slash contemplated throughout the employees of the store by Napoleon B. Dribble and the board. He was remembering the injustice of it all. And suddenly he found his sympathy momentarily with the manikins assembled before him. They, too, in a sense, were employees of Napoleon B. Dribble. They, too, were persecuted.

"Listen," Hugo suddenly shouted. "You will all have a decent, open, honest-to-goodness chance to state the reasons for your conduct. We'll give any and all complaints a fair hearing. It's only just, and we'll be just with you. So if you'll try to keep some semblance of order, we'll lend an ear to your troubles—providing," and here Hugo gave them all a beady brook-no-nonsense stare, "providing they are really troubles."

The audience broke into instantly enthusiastic applause. The manikin cop, having just climbed back on the counters beside Hugo and Judy, seemed displeased with this last.

"Sure and that will be no sport," he said plaintively.

Hugo turned to him.

"You'll have a chance to voice your complaint, too," he reminded the dummy policeman. "As a matter of fact," he grew suddenly magnanimous, "you can be the first to air your squawks."

Judy was busy, at the same time, silencing the applause and cheering. Now Hugo grabbed the manikin cop by the arm and drew him to the front.

"Dummies of Dribble's Department Store," Hugo announced, "we have here the first of your ranks to offer an airing of his ill-treatment, real or fancied, by the management of our store."

The cop cleared his throat somewhat despondently. Clearly, he wasn't any too wild about leaving his position of authority to become the equivalent of a fellow-striker with the other manikins. However, the momentary spotlight in which the dummy policeman now found himself was compensation enough to permit him to continue.

"MY KICK," the cop began, slicing neatly to the nub of his troubles, "is about this nightstick. I've been holding it in my mitt for better than a year. And that sign above me says 'Stop!' Well," he paused pregnantly, "I don't get no chance for to use my stick on no one, and no one never stops like the sign says they should. It is vastly irritatin', that's what it is."

Hugo considered this thoughtfully, then turned to Judy for consultation.

"What do you think?" he asked.

Judy pursed her lovely lips and looked thoughtful.

"I don't know exactly what he has to complain about," she declared. "He doesn't have to pound a beat like most policemen. His uniform is kept in order for him, free-of-charge. He's even given a bath every month. Besides, his one complaint seems to be that he doesn't get a chance to hit people with his club. He can't reasonably expect to be allowed to do that."

Hugo nodded.

"You're right." He turned to the manikin cop. "I don't think you've got any fair claim for damages," he declared.

"But what about me bath?" the cop protested indignantly, seizing at a last straw.

"Your bath?" Hugo frowned. "Do you want more than one a month?"

The manikin representative of law and order paled.

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"Sure and good heavens no," he wheezed. "Less is what I'm wanting."

Hugo looked at him like a teacher at a disappointing child.

"I am afraid we'll have to dismiss your case," he said.

Dispiritedly, the cop climbed down from the platform and moved back into the crowd of fellow dummies. Hugo looked over the upturned painted faces seeking the next complainant.

"I have a squawk," a voice bellowed, and Hugo saw a fat, red-faced manikin waving a pudgy arm for attention. The dummy was clad in a dressing robe, slippers, and possessed—along with his paunch—a gray moustache of great dignity. Hugo beckoned him up.

"My plight," began the fat red-faced chap in the dressing robe immediately upon climbing to the counter top, "is one of the worst in the store." Hugo suddenly caught a whiff of very strong whisky permeating the ozone. It came from the speaker.

The paunched fellow in the gray moustache explained.

"I am in window thirty," he declared. "That's the one with the exhibit of the gentlemen grouped around the fireplace in what is intended to represent a country lodge. I'm the one on the left, holding the decanter of whisky right above a glass in my left hand. I'm looking down at the decanter and glass expectantly, but of course nothing is pouring." He paused, and stepped back a trifle unsteadily.

"Well?" said Hugo. "Go on with it."

"That's it," repeated the paunched dressing robed old gent. "Nothing pours. Not a drop. I have to have twenty-four hours of that sort of torture every day."

HUGO frowned.

"I don't follow you," he said.

"He means he's thirsty," Judy broke in, "constantly, from just looking at that glass and decanter all day long."

The dummy in the dressing robe nodded eagerly.

"That's it," he agreed.

"But you can't reasonably expect to drink during working hours," Hugo protested, somewhat shocked.

"Mr. Dribble does," countered the dummy. "So why shouldn't I?"

"But he's the head of the store, the president. He's entitled to do so if he wishes," Hugo answered impatiently.

"But I should at least be entitled to a snort when the day's work is done, say about ten-thirty in the evening," protested the old manikin gentleman. "That's not going to interfere with business. You try enduring the mental torment I go through day after day, watching an empty glass and an empty bottle in that hot uncomfortable window. You try it and see how you like it!"

Hudo looked at Judy. He was undecided.

"There's a lot of justice in his case," Judy observed.

Hugo nodded judicially.

"There seems to be."

The dressing-robed old gentleman was looking wistfully at Hugo and Judy now. Tears were beginning to rim his red eyes. He started to snivel in his gray moustache while crocodile drops began to trickle down his red cheeks.

"Here, here," Hugo blurted in embarrassment. "There's no reason to carry on. I'll take your case up with Mr. Dribble. I'm sure he'll see his way clear to letting you have a quart a week—off of working hours, of course."

The dressing-robed gentleman's paunch drew in with pleasure and new elan.

"Splendid," he cried. "Excellent. That's all I wanted to know!"

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Hugo smiled as the ex-striker clambered down from the counter. Judy watched him leave, her expression a little more dubious than Hugo's.

"Next!" Hugo cried, and immediately saw a red-headed young manikin—male—pushing through the crowds up to the counter. He had a huge sheet clutched about his body, giving him the appearance of a Roman senator.

"I'm Mr. Preshrunk Snuggies," he announced with red-faced embarrassment.

"Well," Hugo stammered, a little taken aback. "What can I—"

But young Mr. Preshrunk Snuggies was immediately swinging into his plea.

"I'm in the Men's Wear window, number seventeen," Mr. Preshrunk Snuggies declared, "and you have no idea of what's under this sheet."

"Please," Hugo broke in rapidly, "please, Mr. Preshrunk Snuggies, we aren't particularly interested in biology at the moment. If you'll be so kind as to state your ca—"

But Mr. Preshrunk Snuggies was stammering heedlessly on.

"I'm a modest young man, exceptionally modest, in fact. For the past six months they've had me standing by a bed—right off the street where everyone can see—dressed in the most embarrassing costume I've ever modeled. They let me wear nothing but a pair of—" and here the young man hesitated in crimson shame, "nothing but a pair of preshrunk snuggies!"

And with that, the young manikin hysterically threw wide his sheet for a trembling instant to display a purple pair of short form-fitting underdrawers. Then he snapped the sheet around him once more, his expression now one of anguished mortification.

"You see?" wailed young Mr. Preshrunk Snuggies. "You see?"

"I SEE perfectly," Hugo broke in hastily. "And I agree with you that it must be embarrassing. Especially to one of your modesty." Hugo turned to consult Judy, who was giggling quite impolitely.

"What do you think?" he asked her.

"Wow!" said Judy irreverently.

"That," said Hugo icily, "is beside the question. What can we do for Mr. Preshrunk Snuggies?"

"Nothing," Judy giggled in reply, "that Nature already hasn't done."

"Will you be serious?" Hugo demanded indignantly.

Judy controlled her giggling somewhat.

"You might see to it that he's switched to modeling overcoats on the ninth floor," she suggested, "although I think it would be a shame if he were."

Hugo glared at her and swung back to young Mr. Preshrunk Snuggies.

"That is a good suggestion," he said, "we'll have you transferred to the overcoat displays."

"Oh, thank you! Thank you!" babbled the young manikin, clutching his sheet frantically around him and clambering off the showcase.

Hugo turned back to Judy.

"You see," he said triumphantly. "We'll clear up each case one by one, and I'm certain that all the dummies will be back at work before the store opens."

"And that's in forty-five minutes from now," Judy reminded him, looking at her watch.

Then, as he turned back to the crowd of manikins, Hugo noticed with sudden horror that a tumult had started in the rear of their ranks. Manikins, male and female, were scattering in all directions in ever increasing numbers. And through this melee of confusion, Hugo saw a blue coated figure swinging a nightstick. The dummy cop!

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"Break it up!"

The ringing command was coming from the manikin policeman. And he was swinging his club in wide, sweeping arcs. Manikins continued to scatter and flee.

"Break it up, yez! Break it up! No loitering. Get along with yez!"

And suddenly it was horribly clear to Hugo what was happening. The manikin copper, displeased at losing his moments of glory, and further angered by having his own pleas rejected, was now undoing all that he had accomplished. Undoing it all by the simple expedient of acting like a cossack in a May Day parade. Already, from the sections to which the first dispersed manikins had fled, Hugo could hear cries of amusement and the resumption of the previous hubbub.

Judy grabbed Hugo by the arm.

"Oww," she moaned. "We've lost our audience. Now we'll never get them back!"

Crushed and stricken, his victory crumbling before his very eyes, Hugo nodded sickly as he watched the manikin cop swing into the very foremost of the assembly, sending the last members of the manikin gathering off in every direction. The store was once more a madhouse!

And to cap the crushing climax—Hugo suddenly heard a "yip" behind him. In the next instant a small brown ball of fur whistled over the counter and away into the aisles. A fox!

Dogs scrambled over Hugo and Judy, leaping down into the aisles barking madly after the fox. Hoofbeats drummed along the aisles.

Hugo and Judy dropped flat along the top of the showcase just as a great white form soared over them.

"Talllyyyyy Hooooooooo!"

From his position on the showcase, Hugo saw the redjacketed back of the huntress astride the great white horse thundering off down the aisle after the dogs. He buried his head in his arms and groaned . . .

CHAPTER VI

The Switch of Doom

JUDY was shaking Hugo roughly by the shoulder a few moments later.

"Come on," she said. "Stop moaning. It's not getting us anywhere at all."

Hugo lifted his head from his arms.

"We're licked," he said dully. He put his head back in his arms.

Judy pounded him again. When Hugo looked up, her blue eyes were flashing angrily.

"This is no time to quit," she snapped.

Hugo sat up.

"But there's nothing left for us to do," he said. He was the picture of dejection.

"Don't be a sap," Judy answered. "We've both been saps too long. I have another idea. But a good one this time."

This didn't do much to spur Hugo. He still looked glum.

"I should have thought of it in the first place," Judy said quickly. "The lights of the store. They were the cause—unless I'm a niece to the Sea Hag—of the dummies coming to life in the first place." She paused for breath. "Did you happen to think what turning the lights off again might do?"

Hugo considered this.

"No. What would happen?"

"It's just possible that—since the lights, or the fuse blow, or whatever it was—coincided with the coming to life of the dummies, fixing the fuse, or turning off the lights, or something like that might freeze the dummies back into their original states."

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Hugo sat up.

"Where are those light boxes?" he demanded.

Judy slid off the counter to her feet.

"Right near the Model Home, where you first ran into me," she said.

Hugo leaped down beside her.

"Let's go!"

IT WAS five minutes later when Hugo and Judy had pushed their way through the reborn melee of madcap manikins that they arrived at the central lighting boxes of the store. The main switches were some twenty yards to the side of the model home sections, back in an old stock room alcove.

"I'm not any electrician—" Hugo began dubiously as he opened the big fuse and switch box.

"This," said Judy, "is no time to begin worrying about a union card. Get to work."

With more haste than efficiency, Hugo examined the complicated entrails of the big fuse and switch box. The tangled mass of intertwining wires was slightly terrifying to Hugo, since he was the type to be thrown into confusion at the mere sight of a lamp cord. Not the least bit mechanical, or electrical, that was Hugo.

However, for another tense five minutes, while sweat poured down his forehead and trickled down his spine, Hugo fussed with the workings of the switches and fuses. Finally he stood back and looked despairingly at Judy. "I still don't feel that I can safely mess with these," he groaned. "I might kill us both."

"I'm willing to take the chance," Judy said grimly, "I don't see why you aren't."

Hugo swallowed hard.

"All right," he said. "But if I kill us both, don't come around saying I-told-you-so."

"In that event," decided Judy, "I wouldn't be likely to come around saying anything." Her tone was still slightly scornful.

Suddenly Hugo crimsoned.

"Oh, damn it, Judy. I'm not afraid for myself. I don't want anything to happen to you. I, ah, that is, I'm—" he looked at her with an expression that filled in his vocal lapse.

Judy put her hand in his.

"I'm sorry, Hugo. I didn't mean to be snappish. I know what you meant, and, ah, that is, I feel pretty much the same where you're concern—"

It was typical of Hugo Hempsted that love should come to him at a moment like this. He broke in, half-miserable, half wild with joy:

"Judy!"

For a moment they didn't care if the lights in the store were on or off. Then Hugo broke away, reeling with dizziness.

"Now," he said, suddenly masterful, "you must get out of range of this, Judy. Go over to the Model Home. If anything blows up, you'll be sheltered from it."

Judy looked at him for a moment, then gripped his hand in a stout-fella squeeze.

"Good luck, Hugo," she whispered. She was gone then, and the last Hugo saw of her she was moving toward the safety of the Model Home. Considerably mixed up mentally and emotionally, Hugo turned back to the maze of dangerous wires and switches.

IN THE background, Hugo could still hear the clamor going on throughout the store. But he wasn't thinking of the manikins. He was thinking of Napoleon B. Dribble, and of the job Dribble would snatch from him if this electrical hocus pocus didn't restore the store to sanity. He was thinking, too,

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that he wouldn't be the only employee to be out of work at Dribble's that day. The big economy-efficiency cut had probably gone through over the unprotesting committee of ten employees. And then there would be Judy's father. He'd get sacked, too.

Hugo thought of all this, and dominantly—of course—of Judy.

Sighing, he turned back to the switches. He closed his eyes.

"Eeeny, meeeny, miney, moe," Hugo began, fishing his hand out toward the switches.

He pulled the "moe" lever, as every last nerve fiber in his body cringed from the terror of what might happen.

But nothing happened.

Nothing, that is, except that the lights went out.

Nothing, except that the clamor of wild manikin shouts in the background stopped as if they'd been cut with a knife!

For a moment Hugo was too stunned to realize the implications of this. The fact that the lights were out really didn't matter, for the morning sun was streaming in through the great windows of the store and everything was clearly visible. But finally his senses realized that the thing that *did* matter was an accomplished fact. The manikins were strangely silent. The store was as hushed as death!

"Yowweeeeeee!" Hugo suddenly whooped. He dashed out from the tiny alcove of lighting gadgets, looking wildly right and left through the store. Every last manikin, as far as his eyes could see, was frozen back into lifelessness—utterly rigid!

Still whooping with hysterical relief, unconstrained joy, Hugo dashed toward the Model Home.

"Judy," he cried. "Judy, it worked!"

He dashed into the room in which he had first encountered the blonde loveliness of Judy Carmody.

"Judy! Judy!"

Hugo stopped, looking wildly around. There was nothing but silence. For some reason he didn't have time to explain to himself at the moment, his heart hammered in sudden fear.

"Judy!" Hugo called.

There was nothing but silence. Hugo ran into another room, then another. Ten minutes later and he had ransacked every room of the Model Home. Judy wasn't in any of them. His voice was hoarse for calling. Judy wasn't anywhere. Judy didn't answer.

Hugo returned to the first living room. Wretchedly, almost crying in his despair and hurt bewilderment, he slumped down on a couch. He put his head in his hands. Judy Carmody had run out on him. Had deserted him at the most crucial moment. She was probably flying down some side street at this moment, terror stricken, not wanting to be found in the same store with the electrocuted corpse of Hugo Hempsted.

MISERY engulfed him. He took his head from his hands and gazed upward in despair. His eyes hit the clock on the wall. The store, he realized dumbly, would be opening in another fifteen minutes. But it didn't matter now. Nothing mattered—even the fact that the hundred and some manikins had been frozen back to rigid normalcy while engaged in their wild mischief. Even the fact that there wasn't a single dummy in the store in its proper place. And that some of the places in which the dummies now responded were quite improper. No, none of this mattered to Hugo Hempsted.

Hugo had found love—and had had it snatched from him by the treachery and cowardice of the woman in whom

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he'd found it. To hell with life. To hell with the store. To hell with any frantic last minute rearrangements of the dummies. Let them stay as they were. Let life move on. Hugo Hempsted was dead. Or at least his soul was.

Minutes crawled by, but Hugo made no effort to move. No effort to flee from the store before it was opened, before the holocaust created by the manikins who had had a fling at living was discovered. He sat there strickenly, sickly, waiting for the police, or the army, or whatever forces Napoleon B. Dribble would call in to do the job, to take him away to the penitentiary.

At length Hugo was subconsciously aware of voices, of cries and shouts of dismay. He heard laughter, anger, shock, all mingling in those voices. Vaguely Hugo realized that the store had opened, that the employees were filing in for work.

Dribble would arrive soon. But the thought left Hugo without terror. Nothing mattered . . .

"FIND that young man if you have to tear this store upside down to do it!"

Hugo heard the voice thundering very close to the Model Home ten minutes later. But he kept his dejected pose on the couch, never stirring, even though he knew the voice to be that of Napoleon B. Dribble.

"Get hold of that Hempsted if it takes all day! Track him down! Search him out! Bring him to me, personally!"

The voice was thundering nearer, and behind it were other excited voices, worried voices, quailing voices. Dribble and retinue were approaching. The search was on. Hugo wondered if they were all carrying sub-machine guns and accompanied by baying hounds.

Suddenly Hugo stood up and moved falteringly toward the door of the Model Home. There was no sense in waiting for his fate. He could end it by marching bravely into the arms of his persecuters. What difference did it make?

An instant later, and Hugo ran head on into Napoleon B. Dribble, who turned into the door of the Model Home at the same instant that Hugo stepped out.

The two went down in a tangle of arms and legs.

This, Hugo thought at the bottom of the tangle—while the shouts and cries of Dribble's followers added to the confusion—is the final bitter end. Hugo Hempsted is additionally guilty of assault and battery.

People were pulling Hugo roughly to his feet. Hands were grabbing ungently at his collar. Voices shouting. Through the haze of confusion and sickened bitterness, Hugo saw the fat red face of Napoleon B. Dribble bearing down on him.

"Hempsted!" Dribble was shouting. "Let me at him!"

In a sudden burst of angered resentment, Hugo shook himself free of the hands that held. Shook himself free, and found himself facing the beaming countenance and extended paw of Napoleon B. Dribble himself!

Hugo stepped back away from his employer's extended hand. He gasped in sheer incredulity at the happy expression on that red fat face. Something was wrong. Dribble had gone stark raving mad. Dribble was talking.

"Hugo, my boy. We've scoured the store for you. What are you doing in here? My boy, I want to be the first to shake your hand."

Hugo retreated another step back into the living room of the Model Home. Clearly, his employer was a babbling idiot. The havoc wrought by the mani-

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kins had thrown him over the brink into madness.

But Dribble followed, still beaming.

"Are you all right, boy? You look a little pale. Overwork no doubt."

Hugo sank back against the support of the living room wall. He ran a hand over his clammy brow.

"MY HAT'S off, my boy," Dribble babbled. "While all of us sat around talking, you went out and *acted*. It's stupendous. It's the most colossal display of originality, of sheer genius, of solid sense merchandising that I've ever seen! There's not another store in town that will be able to equal our displays."

Hugo gulped, looking for an exit. Dribble would froth at any minute.

"That manikin, the one we had dressed like an eskimo," Dribble boomed. "No one but a genius would have thought of putting him inside our refrigerators. It's magnificent. And the pretty looking female dummy, in the scanties, why, she'll increase the sales in our Men's Apparel section by a hundred dollars an hour!"

Hugo gulped again. But a light was beginning to dawn.

"And the window displays—wow!" Dribble exulted. "People are jamming the streets outside to look at 'em. It's the greatest boom of publicity the store has ever had." He stepped up to Hugo, nudging him with an elbow and winking. "Of course, some of 'em are pretty spicy, but we can run 'em under an injunction, if needs be."

"You mean," Hugo at last found voice, "you like them?"

"Tuhriffic!" Napoleon B. Dribble pronounced. "And all thanks to you, my young genius. Originality! That's what this store has been crying for, and that's what you gave it. You'll be the greatest General Supervisor we've ever had at Dribble's. Between you and me, my boy, I feel like stepping out and letting you run things from now on!"

Hugo Hempsted felt like fainting. But instead, he steadied himself with a hand against a wall panel behind him.

And suddenly the panel on which Hugo had been leaning gave way—inward—while he almost slipped backward to the floor in an effort to regain his balance. But as Dribble stepped up to assist him, Hugo realized that machinery was whirring behind the panel, and that the entire panel was turning in, as a bed swung out.

You never knew what to expect from the gadgets in the model homes, and this folding bed was no exception. For as the bed swung 'round into view—so did the almost suffocated figure of Judy Carmody!

"Judy!" Hugo shouted. "Judy, are you all right?"

Dribble was gazing on in astonishment. Judy dazedly clambered out of her bed prison. Hugo encircled her in his arms.

"Judy, Judy, say something!" Hugo demanded.

"I'm all right, darling," Judy managed. "I'm just darned near suffocated, that's all!"

Hugo suddenly remembered Mr. Dribble and the stupendous good fortune which that worthy proffered. He turned to the president of the store.

"Mr. Dribble," Hugo said happily, "I'd like you to meet the woman who is going to be my wife!"

Napoleon B. Dribble, still happy, although now slightly preplexed, stepped back and regarded the boy and the girl in fond embrace. Still bewilderedly, his eyes flicked to the folding bed. Then he turned back to Hugo.

"Kafff, hmpfh, ah, er, naturally," said Napoleon B. Dribble. "Naturally!"

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The OUTSIDERS

By Duncan Farnsworth

This doorway into an outer world was worse than the electric chair—the chair leads only to death!

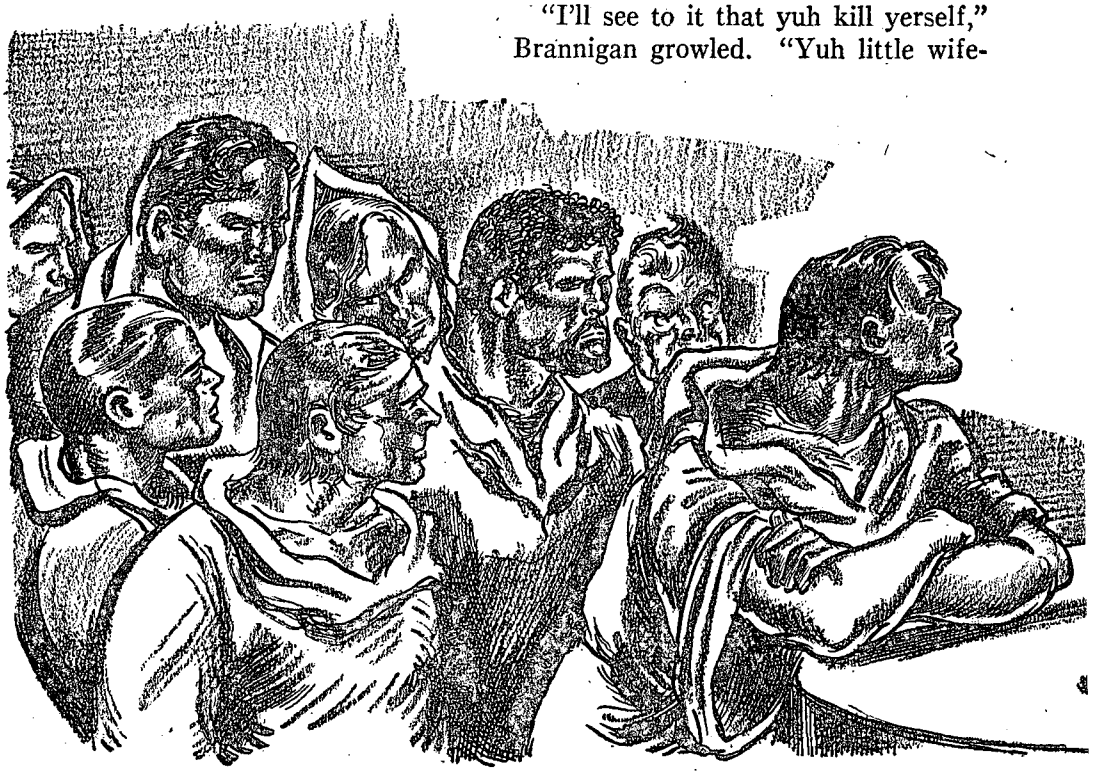
"NO!" the voice bleated. "No, you can't send me there. I won't stand it. I'll kill myself. Oh, God, I'll kill myself, do you hear me? I've done nothing wrong. I loved my dear precious wife. It was rage that made me kill her, do you hear me? No-oh-ohhhhh, God!"

"Shuddup, yuh little slob!" another voice suddenly bellowed. "Shuddup, d'yuh hear me?"

Jon Vance looked up and into the tier directly across from him, where a huge, freckled, red-headed giant stood gripping the bars and glaring fiercely into the cell from which the sobbing came. The big fellow, Jon knew, was a space outlaw named Brannigan.

The sniffling in the cell beside Jon subsided suddenly.

"I'll see to it that yuh kill yerself," Brannigan growled. "Yuh little wife-



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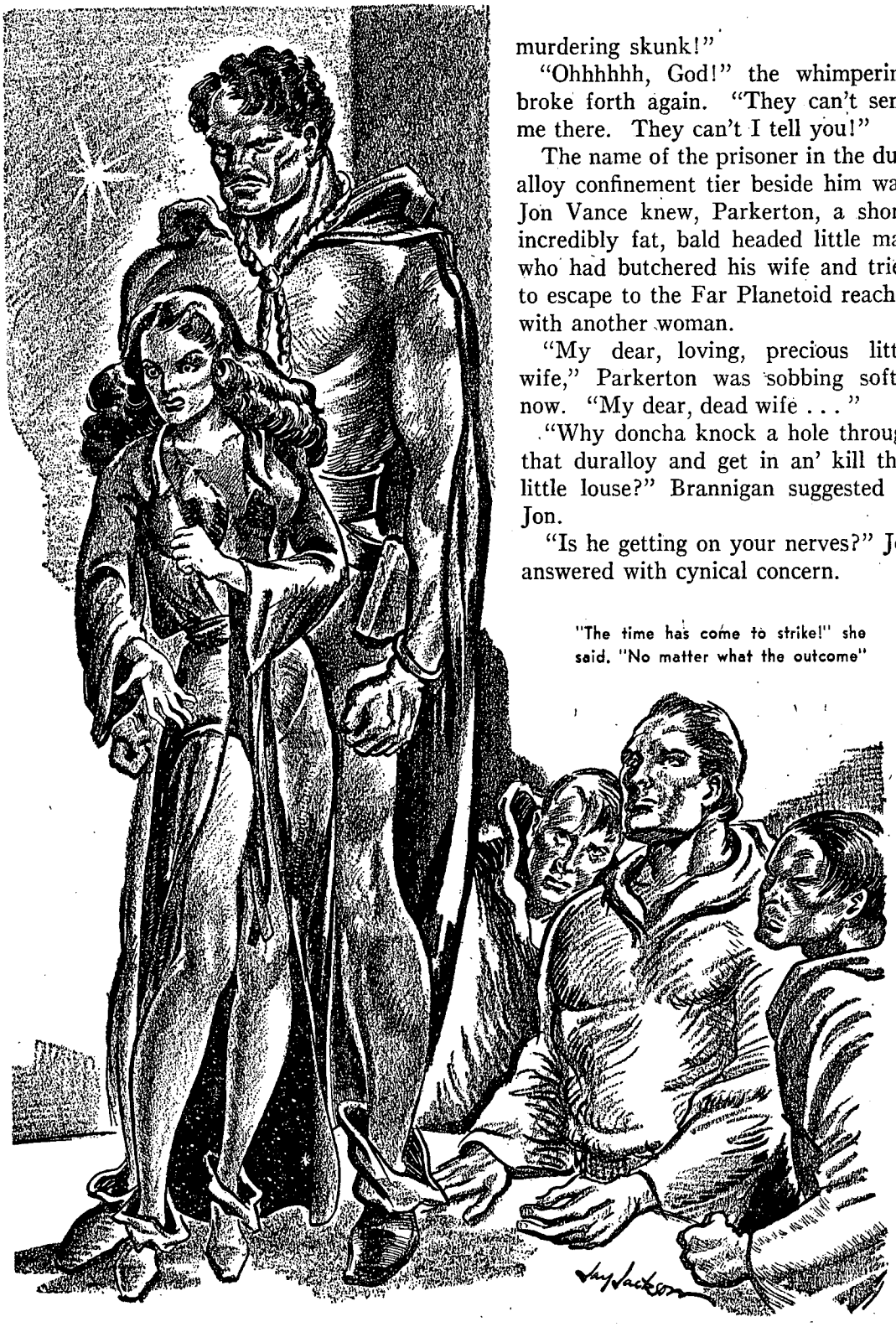

"The time has come to strike!" she said. "No matter what the outcome"

murdering skunk!"

"Ohhhhhh, God!" the whimpering broke forth again. "They can't send me there. They can't I tell you!"

The name of the prisoner in the duralloy confinement tier beside him was, Jon Vance knew, Parkerton, a short, incredibly fat, bald headed little man who had butchered his wife and tried to escape to the Far Planetoid reaches with another woman.

"My dear, loving, precious little wife," Parkerton was sobbing softly now. "My dear, dead wife . . . "

"Why doncha knock a hole through that duralloy and get in an' kill that little louse?" Brannigan suggested to Jon.

"Is he getting on your nerves?" Jon answered with cynical concern.

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The big fellow suddenly relaxed.

"Nah, he's just a pain in my skull, that's all. Don't get me wrong, Vance, this place and what's gonna happen to us don't bother me none. I kin take it, y'unnerstand?"

"You don't fear the unknown?" Jon replied, still sarcastically. "You haven't any dread of a life sentence in a living death? You don't get shaky at the thought of a hell-world prison which you nor I and damn near nobody in this universe knows anything about? The thought of The Door doesn't make your back sweat cold?"

"Yeah," Brannigan snorted contemptuously, "The Door don't bother me none. I ain't afraid of nothing. Whatever is waiting for us Outside* is waiting; worrying about it ain't gonna change it."

Parkerton suddenly squealed hysterically.

"Damn you, damn you both! Stop talking about it! Stop, I tell you! For the love of God, stop!"

Brannigan laughed harshly.

"Shuddup, yuh little skunk!" Then to Jon, he said: "I been wondering about you, Vance. You don't look lousy like the rest of us. What're you in here for? Whodja burn?"

Jon Vance's gray eyes met Brannigan's levelly for an instant, then he answered.

"Someone who needed it very badly."

"Howdja do it?" Brannigan seemed professionally interested.

"Disintegrator pistol," Jon answered.

Brannigan shook his big red head distastefully.

"Sloppy job. Me, I did it different." His voice took on pride. "I wiped out a whole damn space patrolship with atomic cannons."

"Thorough," Jon said in sarcastic tribute, "very thorough."

"Yeah," Brannigan seemed pleased. "Yeah, wasn't it? But they caught me in a Venusian dump three periods later. Never shouldda got so damn drunk."

Parkerton began to moan again.

"I wish they'd hurry up," Brannigan said. "This little stinker's driving me nuts."

There was a humming at the far end of the confinement tier corridor, and a door opened by atomic eye mechanism.

"Ask and you shall receive," Vance mocked cynically. "Here they are now."

THERE was a sudden horrible scream from Parkerton's tier, then the thud of a body thumping to the metal flooring. Brannigan looked into that tier, grinned at Jon Vance.

"Passed out, fainted dead away," he chortled.

Steps were coming down the corridor, and peering out of his tier Jon Vance could see blue-tuniced guards, four of them, marching toward the section, in which he, Brannigan, and Parkerton were quartered.

*Discovered by Professor Alexis Champen, in the year 2000 A.D., The Outside, was the term given to a hitherto unknown world existing in the fourth dimension. The Outside, in the research devoted to it, and the explorations made through it, in the next hundred and fifty years, was finally deemed to be utterly desolate wasteland. Every effort made to exploit this fourth dimensional world commercially was a failure, until in the year 2200 A.D. it was finally decided to turn it into a penal colony for all major lawbreakers and undesirables of the three dimensional world. Since there was but one door to the Outside, the Federation governments took this over, and arranged a system whereby it would be impossible for those banned to that world ever to get back to the old one. In this fashion, civilization began to rid itself of those undesirable to society about the year 2300, when the Outside was closed for the last time, to be used from then on only as a penal world. The year in which this story takes place is 2330 A.D.—Ed.

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The guards stopped before Jon's tier. An atomic eye hummed, and the barred door slid open. Jon rose from his metal bench and stepped into the corridor. One of the guards covered him with a disintegrator pistol. Brannigan, too, was out in the corridor now, and he took his place beside Jon.

"This is the start of the Last Stroll," Brannigan whispered. "It'll be a relief to have it done with."

There was trouble in Parkerton's tier, and Jon heard the sloshing of water poured from a sanitary durnoid bucket. Then there was spluttering, a few moans, and Parkerton was dragged gasping from his tier.

"Walk!" one of the guards commanded Parkerton, but the fat little man moaned slightly, his legs buckling grotesquely. "Drag him," the guard told another. Then, filing out in this queer procession, the little party started down the corridor . . .

JON VANCE and his two fellow prisoners stood in a bleak gray duralloy vaulted room. Behind them was a small door, through which they had been pushed some two minutes previously. In front of them was another thicker and larger door; and directly above this, centered on the gray bleak wall was a large vizascreen. The vizascreen was crackling blue. Now its electrical emanations turned to crimson.

The screen turned pale yellow, and a face appeared on it. The stern, gray moustached visage of the warden of Federation Prisons. He wore the blue uniform of a Federation officer. Now he spoke.

"This is the beginning of your trip to the Outside," the warden said quietly. "You all know why the Federation courts have deemed it necessary that society mete out this supreme punishment to you."

It was Brannigan who broke in harshly.

"Get on with it. Send us along and get it over with!"

Then the warden, looking more stern than before, continued.

"You three have been sentenced for the rest of your natural lives to the 'Outside.' The door in front of you leads to the first of our fourth dimensional locks. When you step through this, it closes on you forever. You will find in the first lock, enough rations and equipment to enable you to endure the rigors of the fourth dimensional world for a certain period of time. What happens to you, once you are 'Outside' will no longer be of our concern."

Parkerton was sobbing hysterically again.

"There will be a second door at the end of the first lock. When you have donned your equipment you will proceed through this second door—which opens to the 'Outside.' That is all."

The vizascreen suddenly crackled pale orange, then faded to a gray that blended with the wall. The warden's face was gone from the screen.

The lights in the gray room seemed suddenly to pale, and a vast ominous humming began. Jon Vance could feel the vibration of it through the duralloy floor. Parkerton lay trembling on the chamber floor now, and Brannigan bent over, fastening one huge paw on the scruff of the rotund fellow's neck, lifting him to his feet.

The door before them opened.

Jon Vance stepped forward, Brannigan beside him, half-dragging Parkerton. In this manner, they filed through the second door. It closed behind them as quickly as it had opened. Now Jon Vance looked around the final chamber.

It was smaller than the first, but of

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the same peculiar gray coloring as the other. And at the end of it, massive and bolted, waited the door to the Outside!

For the first time in many hours, Jon Vance felt his throat constricting dryly. His voice was hoarse as he spoke to his big companion.

"This is it, Brannigan. This is our exit."

Brannigan, too, seemed suddenly less confident. He nodded slowly. Parkerton was now like a man in a trance; his small pig eyes were glazed and lifeless, and although he seemed likely to collapse at any instant, he no longer needed support.

Jon moved over to the side of the chamber. The equipment the warden had told them about was piled there. Three disintegrator pistols, three packsacks of capsulized food supplies, three electric knives—nothing else.

"Here," Jon said, his voice still husky. "The climate is evidently fine on the Outside. All they think we need are these." He picked up the equipment.

Brannigan buckled a disintegrator pistol to his big waist and pushed one huge arm through the packsack Jon handed him. He placed the electric knife in his sack, and Jon distributed his own equipment about his body in the same way.

"What about Parkerton?" Brannigan asked. The fat little man still stood there lifelessly, spittle drooling from the corner of his half-opened mouth. "Think he's gone daffy?"

"We'll keep his gear. I don't think he'll be safe with it for a while." Jon handed Brannigan one of the sacks, and the big fellow threw it unprotestingly across his other shoulder.

"How about his pistol?" Brannigan demanded. Jon buckled the extra disintegrator weapon to his waist in answer, handed the electric knife to the huge redhead.

There was a vast ominous humming again, and the door to the Outside began to open. Jon cleared his throat.

"Come on," he said.

CHAPTER II

Outside!

IT MIGHT have been minutes, or merely seconds in which Jon Vance found himself immersed in a whirling vortex of blackness. He wasn't certain. All he recalled was crossing the threshold of the door. Then a vast wave of swirling irresistible forces lifted him bodily and hurled him through an ebon torrent of air.

Now, groggily, he realized that he was in a heavy gray mist, staggering blindly this way and that in an effort to regain his balance. Somewhere a voice was shouting his name.

"Vance, Jon Vance, where in the hell are you, Vance?"

Jon recognized the voice as belonging to Brannigan, and as his vision began to return to him, was able to discern a bulky shape outlined against the vaporous clouds that were everywhere around him.

"Brannigan," Jon managed to call, "Brannigan!"

A large hand seized his arm, and a voice bellowed into his ear.

"Here, Vance. Beside yuh!"

The vaporous mists were clearing. Jon could see Brannigan's face now, and for the first time there was the tautness of fear at the edges of his wide mouth.

Visibility was possible for a radius of perhaps fifty yards now, and Jon gazed grimly at the bleak, gray, muddy terrain on which they stood. Unconsciously, he shivered, watching the

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vapors dissipate themselves as they rose from the warm gray mud.

"Where's Parkerton?" Brannigan asked in sudden recollection. A soft whimpering behind them answered his question.

Jon and Brannigan wheeled at the same instant. Wheeled to see the fat, slug-like body of the wife-killer inching along toward them on hands and knees!

A sudden wave of revulsion swept over Jon Vance. The expression on Parkerton's round face was one of sheer drooling imbecility.

"Batty!" Brannigan gasped. "Crazy as a comet!"

Slowly, Jon stepped up to the fellow, Brannigan, behind him, stood where he was.

"Parkerton!" Vance snapped.

Parkerton paused in his all-four crawling, looking uncomprehendingly up at Jon Vance.

"Parkerton," Jon repeated, "snap out of it—do you understand?" He reached down and slapped the little man across the face.

Parkerton cringed, the look of imbecilic confusion still on his face.

"It's all over, Parkerton," Jon repeated. "Snap out of it!" He caught him across the face again. He bent over and shook the little man. But Parkerton reacted like a limp sack of wheat. Jon let him drop back to the wet gray mud.

BRANNIGAN drew a disintegrator pistol. Now he pointed it unerringly at Parkerton's skull.

"Step aside," the big fellow ordered Jon, "and I'll let him have it. His mind is gone. We can't keep him with us. We're going to have tough enough going as it is."

Jon looked up in astonishment at Brannigan.

"You can't do that!"

"The hell yuh say," Brannigan snarled. "Step aside. The louse'll be better off." He waved his weapon menacingly.

"Lower that gun," Jon said levelly, his hand started with studied carelessness to the guns strapped at his waist.

"Don't get any ideas, Vance," Brannigan warned, eyes flicking down at Jon's gesture.

The momentary clash between Brannigan and himself had occupied all Jon's concentration until this instant. And now, glancing over his antagonist's shoulder for a flickering instant, he saw that the vaporous mists had almost cleared entirely, and that several miles of the muddy terrain on which they stood were now completely visible.

But this was not what made him start suddenly.

"Brannigan," Jon gasped, "good Lord, man, look!" He pointed over Brannigan's shoulder.

Brannigan's lips moved in a smirk.

"That's got whiskers, Vance. Step aside while I burn that guy!"

Jon's jaw tightened in sudden anger.

"You damned fool." And with a lightning swift gesture, both his hands dropped to the guns at his waist, whipped them forth, and threw them to the mud!

Startled, Brannigan had only time to swing his gun directly on Jon. But in that interval, Jon's guns had already plunked into the soft gray mud. Brannigan started at them in amazement, jaw slack.

"Now, damn you," Jon snarled. "Take a look. It's no trick."

Brannigan, compelled by a will greater than his own, swung around automatically. His gasp of astonishment was loud and profane. Then he turned excitedly to Jon.

"Good God, Vance. Are we both

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crazy, or are those really humans off in the distance?" Brannigan seemed shaken.

"They look like it," Jon answered briefly. "So I imagine they are." He was squinting through the heavy gray atmosphere toward a slight knoll in the distance, toward a swiftly advancing knot of men. The strange group was growing larger, and now Jon bent over, retrieving his guns.

"We might need these," he told Brannigan, holding both ready. "Until we know what's what."

Brannigan looked with wordless respect at the disintegrator pistols in Jon's hands. It was clear that his somewhat slow mind was grappling with the enigma of this Jon Vance, and how it was that he drew faster than Brannigan himself had ever seen even the most skilled space pirates draw. Brannigan shook his head in bewilderment. Then suddenly something struck him as funny. He threw back his big red head and burst into guffaws.

"It's rich," he chortled. "Just think, I was pushing yuh around, threatening to burn a hole in yuh, when alla time yuh could easily have cindered me before I blinked twict!"

Jon smiled mirthlessly.

"You have a strange sense of humor, Brannigan," he said.

"You're pretty strange yourself," Brannigan answered. "Plenty strange, I'm thinking."

THEN, wordlessly, the two stood watching the nearing group of crimson-clad figures in the distance. Behind them, Parkerton lay in an inert heap on the wet gray mud.

"I've often wondered," Jon said quietly in the silence, "if anyone ever survived on the 'Outside.' This seems to be my answer."

"Yeah," said Brannigan. "Maybe this won't be so bad after all. The red tunics on them don't make it look like they're from our group of thirty."

"That," answered Jon, softly, "is just what I've been thinking." His brows knit in speculation. "Those red tunics, if my memory doesn't fail me, were once used as the uniform of the Federation Army."

"Yeah?" Brannigan scratched his head.

"Yeah," Jon's words were clipped, "precisely two hundred years ago, however."

"But—" Brannigan began.

"That's what I was wondering," Jon finished for him.

Brannigan's answer was choked off by the sudden cry that came from a crimson-clad figure at the head of the advancing party. The cry seemed to be caught and muffled to indistinctness by the vaporish fog in the atmosphere.

"What was that?" Brannigan demanded. "What did they shout?"

Jon Vance shook his head.

"I didn't catch it. Sounded vaguely like 'haloooo,' but I'm not sure."

The party was within fifty yards now, and Jon could at last make out the features of the tall, heavily built leader who strode before them. He was a brutish looking fellow, with dark, tangled hair, a thin mouth, and a nose that had been smashed into almost utter flatness against his face.

"Lay down your weapons," a voice thundered, and Jon knew that it came from the leader of the group—the flat nosed person. "We advance in friendliness, and wish to be sure that you are meeting us in the same fashion."

Brannigan bared his big white teeth in a snarl.

"Sounds like a dodge of some sort. Don't do it."

Jon figured rapidly. There seemed to be close to twenty of the crimson-

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clad strangers. He and Brannigan were only two.

"We'll do as they ask," he said.

Brannigan grunted.

"What the hell, we—"

"Do as I say," Jon Vance repeated. And in spite of himself, Brannigan found he was dropping his disintegrator pistol to the mud.

The party had halted, watching Jon and Brannigan. As they saw the two drop their weapons, they came forward.

Jon Vance was watching their approach narrowly, noting many things, one of which was that same distinct similarity between the tunics these strangers wore and the ancient uniforms that had once been worn by the forces of the Federation Army two centuries before.

Jon Vance was watching this and wondering, and calculating, when the flat-nosed leader of the group brought his hand up in a sudden unexcepted gesture—hurling a tiny object directly at the feet of Vance and Brannigan.

Jon shouted too late, for even as he tried to reach downward for his disintegrator pistols, a nauseous stinking black smoke swept up and around him. He felt his sense of balance leaving, the ground reeled. He could hear Brannigan's choking coughing as if from a distance, and realized that his own lungs were filling with the same burning gas that poured from the object that had been unexpectedly tossed at their feet. Jon knew he was falling, and that blackness was swimming everywhere around him. But there was nothing he could do, nothing he could—

CHAPTER III

King Kane

JON VANCE realized that someone was shaking him roughly, and then groggily, he opened his eyes and shook his head in an effort to clear the ache from it. His first desire was to cough, and then he remembered what had happened. . . .

"Come. Up on your feet!"

Jon looked up into the face of the speaker, the person who had roused him. He was a gray-bearded fellow in a somewhat worn red tunic. Jon could make out little of his features except for the uppermost wrinkled parchment of skin above the beard. But the eyes were what made Jon Vance suddenly chill. There was something in the eyes of this old man that was indescribably horrible; a stinking, malignant evil!

It was instinctively that Jon's hand flew to his tunic belt. But even before he felt the emptiness where his disintegrator pistols had been, he realized that all his weapons had been taken from him.

Now his eyes flew around the tiny room in which he lay. It was a small, cubicle-like structure of a metal unfamiliar to him. He had been sleeping on a makeshift bed of thorny wood.

"Up," the old man repeated, and Jon realized that the voice was as unpleasantly evil as the eyes of the creature.

Jon rose to his feet, wondering what had happened to Brannigan and Parkerton. They were both probably in similar confinements. Jon saw that the old man held an atomic pistol in his right hand, and that there was a surprising steadiness to the manner in which he held it.

"Where to?" Jon demanded. "I'm anxious to find out what in the hell this is all about."

"You will," the old man said laconically. "Move in front of me." Jon suddenly found the business end of the atomic pistol pressed into the small of his back. He felt certain that the fetidness in the air was from the old

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fellow's breath as he moved behind him.

"Just march along," the old fellow ordered. "If you head the wrong way, this pistol will navigate you correctly."

Jon Vance marched . . .

IT WAS an utterly dumbfounded Jon Vance who, still guarded by the crimson-tuniced old man, walked into a vast, noisy, huge-domed room some three minutes later. For in his carefully guarded walk from the tiny metal cubicle to this place, he had seen astonishing wonders on every side of him. Jon Vance had become aware that he was in a city, a strange, crudely magnificent city of surprisingly large proportions.

And this strange city was peopled by even stranger citizenry. Human beings, yes, but human beings all similar in one respect to the old man who guarded him—in that they had an incredible evil to them!

Jon was certain now, that this was the "Outside." He had been sure of it from the very first, of course. But lacking any concept of what a fourth dimensional world would be like, he had been slow to adjust his physical processes to his mental realizations. And since this was the "Outside," he knew that the people in this strange metropolis were, like himself, former dwellers in the three-dimensional world, banned by the society of that world.

But the thought that these people would have found survival, and such a survival at that, was hard for Jon to realize. He could not imagine in what manner, for example, they had taken the metal which made their buildings from the gray mud that seemed to be the only type of terrain present.

He wondered, a little grimly, what the reaction would be in the Federation if it were realized that the undersirables had not only managed to maintain life in their banishment, but had also started a civilization such as this. And at the thought of these outcasts living together and forging a new civilization, Jon was instantly jarred back to the uneasy realization that the keynote of this new odd order was not man living in harmony with man, not human relinquishing rights for the betterment of other humans, but that very violent evil force which he read in the eyes of each and every one of them!

The old man, on noting Jon's amazement, chuckled evily:

"It surprises you, doesn't it? Yes, it is incredible to all the newcomers. But you will learn our history, if you are here long enough."

And now Jon was being ushered through a throng of these crimson-tuniced outsiders, up toward the front of the vast hall to which he had been taken.

Jon could feel the eyes of all those in the hall boring into his back. And now he was able to see that a huge sort of dais was situated at the front of the place.

A huge, black-haired, richly-robed figure sat enthroned on this dais. His head was bent slightly forward, making it impossible for Jon to see his features clearly.

The crowds were giving way as the old fellow pushed Jon along ahead of him. At last, when Jon and his captor were but a scant ten yards from the great throne, the huge black-haired figure looked up. Now, for the first time since entering the hall, Jon was able to see the face of the man on the dais.

Jon's footsteps halted. Shock, white and taut, twisted his features. He felt his fists clenching and unclenching, while a thousand trip hammers pounded furiously where his heart should have been.

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TIME, in the breathless interval that Jon gazed into the features of the person on the dais, hung suspended. Then blindingly, a wild, furious red blanket of rage swept over Jon Vance.

An animal snarl choked in his throat, and heedless of the weapon that had been pressed against his back, he lunged forward at the dais. Crimson-tuniced Outsiders were everywhere around him as he broke, and with maniacal strength, Jon threw them aside, pressing still closer to the figure on the dais.

"Damn you," Jon was screaming wildly, "damn your dirty stinking black hide!"

Instinctively, the man on the dais had risen, backing away from Jon's maddened charge. His handsome, sharp features were twisted in a mixture of astonishment and fear.

Blows rained down on Jon's head and shoulders from every side as his hands found and clawed at the edges of the dais.

And an instant later the entire hall was rocked by a vast thundering explosion of orange flame. Simultaneously, Jon had a blurred vision of a great metal screen rising as if from nowhere to surround the man on the dais.

Then something hit him a sickening blow at the base of his skull, and as lights, flame and noise pinwheeled madly through his dimming consciousness, Jon was vaguely, fuzzily, aware that the Outsiders in the hall were shouting, that pistols were spatting furiously above it all. After that, he knew nothing . . .

CHAPTER IV

The Wolves

GENTLY, very softly, waves washed over Jon Vance's face. Groggily, he tried to rise, realizing vaguely that he was stretched out flat on a hard sort of bench. The pinwheels, for the first few minutes in which he endeavored to bring his eyes into focus, still whirled giddily.

Finally the whirling ceased, and at the same instant Jon found the strength to lift himself to one elbow. The waves that had been lapping over his face were, in reality, a wet soft rag. A hand was holding the rag, had been mopping Jon's face. An incredibly slim and velvetly beautiful hand, Jon found out as he reached forth and seized it.

"Wha—" Jon began, holding firmly to the soft wrist; his eyes brought the rest of the scene suddenly into focus; he gasped.

He held the wrist of an incredibly lovely girl, a brunette, who gazed solemnly down at him. She wore a soft, flowing gray domino, and the cowl was back over her shoulders.

"You are better now, Jon Vance," she said. "Do not try to talk until your strength has returned."

Jon released his grasp on her wrist in amazement.

"What, that is, who are you? Where—" he faltered.

"You are in one of the caves of the wolves," the girl said gravely. "We brought you from the throne hall of King Kane."

Jon sat up now, gingerly, looking at the girl with grim suspicion.

"Kane," he hissed, "that damnable swine. I was just about to—" he broke off, shaken by the anger of his emotions.

"So were we," the girl said. "We were just about to kill King Kane. Your unexpected attempt to assault him spoiled our very carefully laid plans."

"The explosion," Jon began. "The orange flame that followed it, were they a signal, a—"

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The girl cut Jon off this time.

"They signaled our attack. The raid of a wolf pack. We might have gotten to Kane. We would have, in fact, if the screen hadn't surrounded him as you attempted to get to him."

Jon put his head in his hands, trying to drive away the fuzziness that still wrapped his efforts to think clearly. He looked up again.

"Who are you? What are the wolves? Are we still 'Outside?'" he demanded suddenly. Then, as a sudden afterthought, "How do you know my name?"

The girl was still gravely unsmiling as she answered.

"I will try to answer your questions one at a time. The first, about my name. I am Maydo, Maydo Melory. You will learn of the wolves in a very short time. You are, of course, 'Outside.' There is no way out from this fourth dimensional world. I know it all too well. I have been here since I was a very small child." She paused. "We learned your identity from spies of ours in Kane's city. A certain Parkerton, who was sent here with you, revealed that to Kane's questioners when you were first captured."

Jon sat up a little straighter. Things were becoming a bit more coherent. Now at least he knew what had happened to Parkerton.

"And the other," he found himself saying unconsciously, "the big strapping red-headed fellow; was he taken by Kane's men also?"

Maydo Melory nodded.

"He is a prisoner, just as you were before they took you for questioning."

"But the wolves," Jon insisted. "Who are you?"

"In this kingdom of evil," the girl replied, "not all are of the same caliber as King Kane and his lot. There are those who were condemned to the 'Outside' unjustly."

Jon Vance rubbed his hard jaw.

"I know," he answered laconically. "And the wolves comprise those who can't live in the same world as Kane's."

Maydo nodded.

"We are fugitives, a scant minority compared to the thousands of criminal beings who live under Kane's rule. We live in caves, sheltered and unknown to Kane. We do our best to fight against the horrible domination he holds over this world."

"Kane has been here how long?" Jon demanded.

"Twenty years. And in that time he has organized the forces of evil into the malignant civilization you saw but a few hours ago."

TAUTNESS came to Jon's features again as he said with soft deadliness.

"Then I was right. I knew I was right. Twenty years!"

The girl looked puzzled.

"I do not understand."

Jon brushed her half query aside.

"It's not immediately important, to you. Tell me," he said suddenly, "why did they bring me here? Why didn't they kill me, or leave me there with Kane's crowd?"

The girl seemed quite bland as she said:

"We may kill you yet, if we find it is necessary. We suspected, however, that your rage against King Kane marked you as not one of his satanical brood. We have all too few additions to our pack. Kane usually seizes all new arrivals to the 'Outside'—as he did in your case—and kills those whom he doesn't consider adaptable to his evil civilization."

Jon rubbed his jaw again.

"I see," he said with grim humor, "if I fit, you'll keep me around. If not,

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you'll kill me. Is that it?"

The girl nodded.

"After all, it was your unwitting assault on Kane that ruined our plans to assassinate him." She paused. "You might have been killed. But I instructed the pack to seize you and bring you along."

Jon blinked in astonishment.

"*You* instructed them?"

The girl nodded.

"Naturally, I was leading the raiding party."

Jon looked at the slim, delicate loveliness of the girl, unable to visualize her at the head of a raiding party.

"Who heads the entire aggregation of wolves?" he asked.

Again the girl was calmly assured.

"I am the leader," she asserted. "I took charge when Kane captured my father."

Jon frowned.

"Your father is Kane's captive at this moment?"

The girl bit her lower lip.

"He is Professor Melory. Kane is forcing him to work out a solution to his devilish dream of world conquest."

Jon was still frowning.

"Melory, Melory, Good God, girl—not the Professor Melory who was head consultant for the Federation Science Academy some eighteen years ago!"

The girl nodded gravely.

"The same Professor Melory." There was obvious pride in her voice. "The man who gave the Federation its most valuable scientific advancements in the past two centuries."

"But he was supposed to have been killed, a space liner disaster. His wife, his daughter—" Jon faltered.

"The Federations learned that. But it was not true. My father, my mother, and I were sent here, into the 'Outside,' by jealous politicians of the Corbae regime. It was never known. The space liner disaster was arranged to cover it up."

"And you were just a child, a mere kid," Jon said, aghast.

"My mother was killed by the severe climate, the terrible hardships," the girl said.

"You mentioned a design, a plan, of Kane's to rule the world," Jon sharply changed tack. "What did you mean?" The girl's voice grew slightly grim.

"He is frantically searching for a way back to the three-dimensional universe. He plans some sort of a concerted barrage on the Door. Should he succeed, his hellish legions would be unleashed against all decency in the world."

"He'll never live to accomplish that," Jon said quietly. "I didn't get to him this time, but I've been waiting a long time for this chance. I'll not miss on the next."

"You knew Kane before?" the girl asked. "Previous to the time when he was sentenced to the 'Outside?' "

"When I was six years old," Jon said grimly, "I watched Kane kill my father and mother while his dirty swine looted our space outpost. I never forgot it. I'll never be able to." Suddenly his jaws shut. "But that's my affair."

"Please," the girl put her hand on his arm. "It is important to both of us that you tell me the rest. We must know your past. Did you come here seeking Kane?"

THERE was cynical bitterness in Jon's eyes as he smiled humorlessly at the girl.

"I suppose it can't make any difference. No—I didn't come here after Kane. I never knew what had happened to him. I didn't know that he'd been sent to the 'Outside.' Maybe it was some form of fate that led to my

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being sent here for—murder."

Maydo looked surprised.

"Murder—but you didn't, did you?"

Jon nodded.

"I killed a man who needed killing. He was one of Kane's band at the time that my father and mother were killed. I tracked down most of that band in the years that followed. It was my one purpose in life—squaring that account."

"But to kill an outlaw," Maydo protested, puzzled.

"Ironically enough," Jon interrupted, "by the time I found this particular pig, he had changed his identity and was hiding out in, of all places, the Space Patrol. So I was nabbed for slaying a Federation officer."

"But you could have proved—" Maydo began again.

"Proved hell," Jon snapped. "No one would have believed me. Besides, with the exception of Kane, this fellow was the last of the bunch on whom I'd sworn vengeance. Kane, from all I could learn, had disappeared for good. I cleaned the slate as best I could. There was nothing left to live for really, and the 'Outside' would at least be something new."

"And you had no idea Kane was here," Maydo said reflectively.

"Not until I saw him in that huge hall, up on the dais," Jon answered. "I'd have known that face in a million miles of Hell. I guess the shock was too much. I went out of my head in rage. If I'd had sense I'd have held my tongue and waited my chance."

"Perhaps you'll have your chance," Maydo promised.

The girl stood up now, looking gravely down at Jon.

"You will rest again. Your wounds are not serious. In a few more hours you should be able to move around."

"And am I a prisoner?" Jon asked.

The girl looked at Jon for a moment, and he noticed again the cool level beauty in her gray eyes, the delicate oval loveliness of her features.

"No," she said after a moment, "no, you are not a prisoner. I believe what you have told me."

She turned and walked to the door of the little cell-like room. There, she faced him once more.

"This door is unlocked. It leads to the corridor of our great wolf cave. When you have rested, join us in the cave."

Then she was gone, and Jon—looking at the door which she had closed behind her—found himself engaged in a speculation strange to him. . . .

CHAPTER V

Two More

IT WAS several hours later when Jon woke again and found himself on the hard little cot in the small cell. For an instant he had difficulty in recalling where he was and how he had gotten here. But his brain was clear, now, and as soon as his memory satisfied itself, he rose and began dressing.

When he had donned his tunic, Jon hesitated a moment, then stepped out the door of the tiny cell and into a long, damp corridor.

The walls of the corridor seemed to have been hewn out of rock and clay substance, and were slick and shiny with moisture. The floor, however, was firm and dry, made of some metallic composition unfamiliar to him.

Jon had little difficulty in finding his way along the corridor, for it was well lighted. Several hundred yards away, at the end of the corridor, there was a blaze of light that unmistakably marked the central wolf cave.

And two minutes later, Jon stood at the entrance to this vast underground

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meeting place, looking curiously at the scene going on in there.

The place was approximately a hundred yards wide and the same distance long. The walls, unlike those of the corridor, were covered with a gray metallic cloth of some sort which extended to the floor from a ceiling that was at least a hundred feet high.

The floors were of the same metallic substance as the floors in the corridor, but were tinted a deep rich red. And there were at least a hundred, gray-cowled figures grouped at the far end of the vast hall. Faintly, their voices came to him, and Jon realized that the lack of volume and echo in the place was due to the heavy wall drapes.

Jon saw that these figures were grouped around an elevated platform, on which a slim, gray-cowled girl was standing. Also on the platform were several other hooded figures, and two ragged creatures in red tunics.

One glance told Jon that the first of the ragged, red-tuniced figures on the platform was Brannigan!

Jon gasped in surprise, and then in exultation, for he felt a sense of relief in knowing that the big redheaded fellow was free, had escaped from Kane's kingdom. Jon moved rapidly across the hall, and a minute later was pushing his way through the fringes of the gray hooded wolves around the platform.

It was Brannigan, all right, and the slim girl on the platform with him was Maydo Melory.

The hooded gray-shrouded wolves around the platform gave way as Jon pushed through them, looking curiously at him as he moved. The girl Maydo saw him then. And so did Brannigan at the same instant.

"Vance!" Brannigan shouted. He seemed intensely relieved at seeing Jon.

"I am glad you are here, Jon Vance," Maydo said.

And now, for the first time, Jon realized that the other ragged figure standing beside Brannigan was the fat, trembling little Parkerton!

VANCE ascended the platform and moved over to the girl.

"What's this?" he asked. "How did they get here?"

"They were picked up by one of our wolf patrols," Maydo answered.

"They claim to have escaped from Kane's cells."

"It's the truth, Vance," Brannigan's deep basso insisted. "So help me!"

"It is practically impossible to escape from Kane's hands without aid of some sort," Maydo said.

Parkerton spoke for the first time, and Jon noticed that—except for the expected quavering fear of his loose lips—he seemed to have regained some degree of normalcy.

"I had a chance. I took a disintegrator pistol and hid it under my tunic," he said shakily. "When the moment was ripe, I slipped it to Brannigan. We blasted our way out." His face was streaked with sweat, and there was a smear of blood on his left temple.

"It's true, Vance," Brannigan insisted. "I guess I fried six of 'em in getting away. Wouldn't have brought this little mutt, except that he snatched the disintegrator gun for me."

Maydo looked at Jon uncertainly.

"I think we should kill them to be on the safe side," she said.

Jon returned her stare.

"Brannigan's a good man to have with us," he said. "And Parkerton, as long as he's done what he has, deserves to live."

"Your reasoning," the girl said after a moment, "is sound, and fair. She turned to the cowled figures standing beside the red headed giant and the

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trembling little fat man. "We'll let them live," she declared.

Then she turned to Jon.

"You, and this Brannigan person, come with me," she commanded. "The little fat man evidently needs rest from the strain he's been under. We must talk to Dorne, my most trusted lieutenant."

Brannigan grabbed Jon's arm as they turned to follow the girl down the platform steps.

"Thanks," he muttered huskily.

JON sat with Brannigan and the girl Maydo Melory in a small, bleak, severe little room which was somewhere near the corridor cell cave Jon had first occupied. In the middle of the room was a table, behind which sat a slim, wiry, pale young man wearing the long flowing gray shroud of the wolves.

His cowl was thrown back, and his dark hair was tousled as he ran his hand through it to emphasize his statements.

"It is imperative, Maydo," he said, "that we strike within the next twenty-four hours. Kane has already assembled the great battering ray equipment before the Door. I'm certain he means to begin the assault very soon."

"But my father would not have given Kane the information to—" the girl began.

"In all respect to your father, Maydo, there is only so much that any man can stand. Kane's torture methods are effective," her young lieutenant insisted.

Jon saw the girl's face go pale. She bit her underlip.

"They have held him captive for two years now. Surely, in that time we would have—"

"Would have known precisely what was going on? Would have known how much and what sort of information your father was supplying them with?" the young man said. He shook his head. "No, Maydo. Even our spies have been unable to learn that much. They have learned only that your father is still alive, and that for the past eighteen months Kane has had him working feverishly in the laboratories for him."

The girl was silent for a moment, as if weighing the situation mentally. Then she said:

"Very well, Dorne. We will go ahead with the plans you have formulated."

The slim, wiry, handsome young lieutenant stood up and moved over to the girl. He put his hand gently on her arm.

"It is a chance we have to take, Maydo," he said softly. "I don't want to go over your command in this, but I'm certain this is the best strategy." He paused, "Had our attempt to assassinate Kane succeeded," his eyes flicked momentarily to Jon's, "we might have been able to wait, to let the turmoil within their ranks break forth. But now we've no other course."

Jon found himself on his feet.

"I don't know what your plans are, although I understand the situation well enough to realize that Kane plans to barrage the Door back to the three dimensional world, and that you want to prevent it. I imagine that Brannigan and I were called here to be assigned some part in this undertaking." He halted, as if surprised that he had spoken, then barged onward. "All I ask, for my own part in all this, is a chance to trade my life for Kane's. And you can count on my succeeding, if you'll give me the chance!"

The girl Maydo looked at young Dorne.

"You know of his hatred for Kane," she said. "You know the reason."

Young Dorne nodded.

"I knew that, of course," he declared. "And as a consequence, I held

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just such a part for him, knowing that he'd ask for it."

Jon's mouth tightened to a thin line. "I'm asking for it," he declared.

"It means the end, Jon Vance," the girl reminded him. "You'll face Kane alone, with no returning."

"I couldn't ask for more," Jon answered, "than to die after seeing him die."

YOUNG Dorne now turned to Brannigan.

"You're capable with atomic cannons, aren't you?" he asked.

Brannigan seemed surprised.

"Atomic cannons?" he growled. "Here in the 'outside'?"

"We have six of them," Dorne said. "Maydo's father developed them for the wolves before Kane captured him. They're comparatively crude affairs, Brannigan, but workable. Like to take charge of a nest of them?"

Brannigan stood up, licking his lips. His face was working queerly.

"It's likely to be another suicide post," Dorne warned him.

Brannigan shook his big touseled red head.

"That ain't what I'm thinking," he said. "It's that yuh'd trust me—like that—without knowing nothing about me. I'm a no good space skunk," he ended confusedly.

"But we're taking a chance on you, Brannigan," the girl said. "And we're sure it isn't a big one. Frankly, the man who was to command the post we're offering was killed in our last raid."

Suddenly a mile wide grin split Brannigan's face.

"That's better," he said huskily. "I kin understand that kind of talk. You're stuck, and I come along outta a clear strata to fill in a spot. I feel easier taking yuh up on that proposition." He made an effort at clearing his throat. "Yuh're on," he grinned.

Maydo Melory and Dorne smiled at the same time.

"Fine," Dorne said. "Now to get down to business while I explain our plans to you both." He went back behind the table, and from his tunic shroud pulled forth a thick sheaf of papers. He placed these on the table, and with one hand indicated that Jon and Brannigan should come closer. Maydo moved forward with them. But for the first few minutes, while Dorne spoke, Jon gazed down at the charts on the table, aware that he wasn't conscious of the words tumbling from the young lieutenant's lips. Jon Vance had seen Maydo Melory smile. And that smile was causing a curious pounding in his long embittered heart.

CHAPTER VI

Parkerton's Post

SOMEONE shook Jon roughly by the shoulder, and blinking his eyes, he rose to one elbow and looked sleepily at Brannigan standing there in the half darkness of their small cave room.

Brannigan was wearing a flowing gray shroud, but he hadn't pulled the cowl over his mop of red hair as yet. Twin disintegrator pistols were strapped to his thick waist.

"Here," Brannigan said. He held another gray domino out to Jon. "Climb inta this. The wolves is getting ready to move."

Jon rubbed the sleep from his eyes and stood up. He stretched, and sighed, then took the flowing gray robe.

"They woke you?" Jon asked, voice muffled as he slipped the soft robe over his head.

"Hell," Brannigan said, "I been up and prowling around fer the last two

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hours. I looked at them atomic cannons. They're dazzlers."

Jon was in his gray shroud like costume, now, and he picked up a twin set of disintegrator pistols lying on a table by his cot. He strapped them securely to his waist.

"You got a tough job," Brannigan said suddenly.

Jon shrugged.

"With a big payoff. That's all I'm interested in."

"What about the girl?" Brannigan's question cracked like a whip, catching Jon unprepared.

"Maydo Melory?"

"You know I mean her." Brannigan said. "You won't be coming back, if what they say is true."

"So?" Jon had pulled a disintegrator pistol from his metalleath holster and was inspecting it casually, too casually.

"I got eyes," Brannigan persisted stubbornly. "You've fallen for her."

Jon laughed harshly, but kept his gaze from the big readhead's.

"What I'm going to do is more important," he evaded. "Besides, there's young Dorne. He's a handsome lad."

"You never been messed up with wenches," Brannigan said reflectively. "Until now." He shook his head. "It's easy to tell."

"We can forget that, Brannigan," Jon snapped. He thrust his disintegrator pistol savagely back into its metalleath holster.

Brannigan turned to the door.

"Come on," he said. "They're all out in the big central cave." Jon followed him out into the corridor, and all the while he sought to keep the hated face of Kane before his mind. It wasn't easy, for a girl in a gray cowl kept returning . . .

THE central wolf cave was crowded when Jon and Brannigan arrived there. Apparently the total strength of the wolves had been amassed here for zero hour instructions, for on the platform at the far end, Maydo Melory, young Dorne, and several others waited silently for the last of their group to enter the crude hall.

Finally, Dorne was speaking.

"The hour is at hand," he began. "Aside from our sentry posts, every last one of us is assembled here for final instructions. We all know the parts we are expected to perform. I am certain none of us shall fail." He paused. "Kane has massed thousands before the Door, and they wait the signal for the barrage. We are outnumbered ten to one, perhaps more. But we have the advantage in superior cunning, surprise, and courage. They shall pull us through."

There was a swelling murmur from the crowd.

"Half of our strength," Dorne went on, "will be thrown to prevent the assault of the Door. The other half will be hurled against Kane's city. There are many of our prisoners there. Women, children, and some of the old men." He paused. "The safety of these last depend on the swiftness of the assault on the city."

Silence fell over the group while Dorne paused again.

"As for the rest of it," Dorne concluded, "we all know the plans and our part in the plans. May God give us strength, and luck, and courage!"

Tumultuous cheering broke forth at this, holding for fully five minutes, while Dorne stepped back and Maydo Melory took the front of the platform. Then the girl raised her arms, and in a moment there was silence again.

Jon, watching her from where he stood at the fringes of the crowd, felt a peculiar catch in his throat as the beauty and fire of the girl seemed to

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reach out and dominate the breathless silence.

"The prospects of death should not terrify any of us here," she said suddenly. "All of us have once been doomed. It is only the shadow of defeat, the terror of failure, we should fear. Let us look to the hours ahead with determination, and faith. We shall wipe out the cancer that is Kane and his kingdom!"

This time the cheering was doubled in volume, and the waves of it swept back and forth across the caves like a powerful living force. Jon turned his head, while icy fingers of excitement ran up and down his spine, and saw that Brannigan was wetting his lips while his big fists tightened on the disintegrator pistols strapped to his sides.

Dorne, Maydo, and the others on the platform were going down into the crowds, and the wolves were beginning to break into orderly ranks, filing through the four side doors of the huge cave and out into the corridors that led to the ground above.

MAYDO was advancing to where Jon and Brannigan stood. Dorne was behind her.

"You are ready?" Maydo asked, her gray eyes meeting Jon's.

"All set," Jon answered.

"Ready," Brannigan asserted, "and raring to go."

"Good," Dorne broke in. "Let us get on. We'll—"

"Dorne! Maydo!" The voice broke in sharply behind the group, and all whirled to see a breathless, gray-robed sentry rushing up to them. He carried an atomic rifle in one hand, and a strange sort of horn was slung in a sheath over his left shoulder.

"What is it?" Dorne stepped up to him.

"The little one, the fat fellow!" The sentry gasped.

"Parkerton!" Jon grated under his breath.

"He's gone," the sentry gasped, "vanished from his cell. It was unlocked, according to your orders. He must have slipped through our sentry posts sometime this night. How, we haven't—"

Dorne broke in.

"You blundering asses, were you asleep?"

The sentry crimsoned. But Maydo said,

"There is nothing that can be done about this now. It is too late for that. If he's gone to Kane's kingdom, it's with complete information concerning our plans. We must think, and quickly!"

Brannigan's jaws grated angrily.

"The dirty, stinking little skunk!" he thundered. "I should have known there was something queer about his grabbing them disintegrators. Kane probably put him up to it, and had him let me out to make it look on the level!"

Jon looked at the girl.

"You have a right to suspect us," he said evenly. "Do you?"

Maydo dismissed this idea with a sentence.

"You both would be gone also, if that were true," she said.

"We'll have to completely revise our plans," Dorne said despairingly.

"Wait!" Jon snapped. "That's probably what Kane will expect you to do."

Dorne looked curiously at him.

"What make you think so?"

"He'll know that you'll spot Parkerton's disappearance, won't he?" Jon demanded.

"Of course," It was Maydo who spoke.

"And he'll also know that you'll realize Parkerton has gone to him with all the information about your plans,

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won't he?" Jon rushed on.

Dorne nodded slowly.

"All of which would throw you off, make you devise hasty, ill-conceived spur of the moment plans to supplement them," Jon declared. "This would be playing right into Kane's hands!"

"It is logical," Maydo admitted.

"Then proceed as you originally intended to," Jon advised eagerly. "It will be the last thing in the world that Kane would expect."

Dorne spoke up.

"I think you're right," he snapped. "It's our best out, even though it's risky."

Maydo looked at Jon, then turned to Dorne.

"I agree," she said evenly. "We'll have to carry on."

"Let's get up above, then," Dorne said, and to the sentry, he added. "None of this to anyone, you understand?"

The sentry nodded, and Jon, Brannigan, Maydo, and Dorne started toward the corridor exit at the far end of the great cave.

CHAPTER VII

Attack!

THE little group emerged from the last of the labyrinthine corridors of the caves some ten minutes later, and Jon found himself surrounded by the foggy mists and vapors that blanketed the upper areas of the Outside.

He turned to Maydo.

"It is difficult to see. Have the others already deployed for attack?"

The girl smiled.

"They are still here. A scant fifty yards away from you. The material of the wolf shrouds has been treated chemically, making them almost indiscernible in the gray vapors that rise from the ground. They provide an excellent camouflage. If I were to move more than fifteen feet away from you, it would be difficult to see me any longer."

And then Jon heard the voices coming from the ranks of the wolves, faint and muffled, and he realized the girl was right.

Jon frowned.

"It'll be tough work finding my way to Kane's city."

Dorne extended a small, glittering object.

"Here is a berko-compass. On its face, reduced almost a thousand times to a miniature, you will see most of the fourth dimensional terrain marked. A small, faint, red line moves back and forth along it. That line represents you—the course you're traveling. It's an infallible guide. Strap it to your wrist."

Jon took the berko-compass. It was square, its surface being two inches in each direction. It was indeed, a small map of the Outside, or at least of the known sections.

"My father," Maydo explained, "was the inventor of the berko-compass."

"Which of you," Jon said suddenly, "will lead the assault against the Door barrage?""

"I shall," Maydo said.

"But—" Jon began, and Dorne, reading his thoughts, broke in with, "It's not as dangerous as the other post, Vance. Maydo can take care of herself very well."

Jon noticed Brannigan grinning at him, and red-faced, he said.

"Then your wolves will be the ones to follow me into Kane's city, eh Dorne?"

"We will give you time to get to Kane," Dorne said. "Then on your signal, we'll strike."

Maydo turned to Jon, extending her soft hand.

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"Goodbye, Jon Vance. And good luck. Perhaps we shall see each other again."

Jon fought back the lump in his throat, taking her hand briefly, then turned quickly back to Dorne.

"I'll set out now," he snapped. "You can watch for my signal as agreed."

Brannigan was beside Jon, and stuck out his big paw.

"So long, Vance," he said. "Keep yuhr nose clean, and good luck." Then, bending close to Jon's ear, he whispered, "I'm with Maydo's bunch. I'll look out fer her. Just in case yuh come back."

Jon gripped his hand.

"Thanks," he said.

"Good luck, Vance," Dorne added.

Jon nodded, grinning tightly.

"Well, this is what I've been waiting for," he said. Then he turned, and watching his berko-compass, he set out through the heavy gray vapors. The tiny red line on the face of the map-like compass showed him that he was headed correctly for Kane's city. . . .

IT WAS amazing to Jon, how close the secret wolf caves were located to Kane's city. Inside of an hour, the tiny red line showed him to be in the vicinity of the metropolis, and remembering his instructions, Jon began a wide circle that would bring him to the rear of Kane's crude citadel.

According to what the spies of the wolf pack had learned, Kane was to remain in his city until the attack against the Door had started. Most of his personal guards, and several of his underlings would remain with him, while the actual assault against the Door would be begun by his brigand troops.

Kane's personal guards would be depleted to a great extent, however, when they took the vacated positions of the regular troops in guarding the prisoners in Kane's subterranean vaults.

Dorne's strategy was sound. On a signal from Jon—indicating that he'd made his way safely into the almost deserted city itself—Dorne and his brigade of wolves would attack. This would mean that the prisoner's guards, and Kane's personal guards and underlings, would be forced into a defense of the city.

It was then that Jon was to find Kane. Find Kane and trade his life for that of the ruthless leader's.

Jon was close enough to the city, now, to see its low, gray metallic walls. And he dropped to the mud, inching his way closer and closer to the point where he knew one of the gates to be.

A vast, searching yellow beam of light suddenly swung down from one of the walls, its penetrating finger slicing through the mist and vapors as it swept across the terrain outside. Jon halted, digging his fingers into the mud and cursing. Dorne had forgotten to tell him of this.

The beam swept over him, then on, and Jon gasped with relief that he'd not been seen. Jon raised his head slightly—he'd pulled the cowl over it long before—and at that instant the beam of yellow light swept back in his direction. Jon's head dropped to the gray mud, and he stayed there breathless. He could feel the heat of the light playing across his body.

Then it went away. The coloring of the gray shroud had saved him apparently. Cautiously, Jon waited, counting off seconds as the beam swept on far to the right. Raising his head ever so slightly, he could see the beam halt, and the finger of it start back in his direction once more. Again he dropped his head. Again he counted off seconds, felt the heat of the beam as it passed over him. This time it didn't

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linger. This happened four more times. And each time Jon counted off seconds. Now he had it, and the instant the beam swept over him and onward on the next occasion, he began inching forward, still counting to himself.

Alternately now, Jon inched forward and stopped precisely two seconds before the beam found him again. He had its timing down perfectly. At last he was inside its range, and less than a hundred feet from the wall of the city itself.

There was a long, unused sewer extension, exactly where Dorne had said it would be. And Jon slipped down into this a moment later. It was close, fetid, and inky black as he squirmed his way along. Gradually, it straightened out, and Jon saw a patch of murky light at its far end. Jon made this three minutes later, and emerged inside a deserted street in Kane's city!

THE sound of footsteps along the metallic walks made Jon step quickly into a darkened alley alcove. Guards passed by, two of them, talking softly to one another.

Jon held his breath, and when they had gone, he reached into his gray shroud and pulled forth a small, wrinkled sheet of paper. Dorne had mapped out the city on this. After studying it a moment, Jon found his location. Slowly then, taking occasional refuge in concealing doorways, Jon made his way toward the center of the city. It was here that Kane had his palace. And it was within four hundred yards of here, that the great atomic dynamos of the city were housed.

Two minutes later, in the vapory murk, Jon couched beside the great metal building in which the dynamos were situated. From the flowing folds of his robe, Jon brought forth a small white box. He bent over, scraping the slime away from the base of the wall before him. He found a slight indentation in the metal wall, and squeezed the tiny box into that.

Jon moved swiftly away, now, across the murky narrow street, taking refuge two or three hundred yards on in the shelter of an alleyway. Then, from his gray robe, he drew forth another box, almost identical to the first except for a small switch on its surface. Jon looked up at the dynamo plant several hundred yards off, then he pulled the switch on the box in his hands.

A split second later, with a thunderous detonation and a vast magnificent blazing burst of orange flame, the metallic dynamo plant exploded!

Dorne, waiting out there with his pack beyond the walls, had his signal!

The confusion was terrible. Crimson-clad guards rushed out of doors and down the tiny streets. Jon, from his darkened point of concealment, watched the turmoil with grim satisfaction. But his eyes were fixed on the great metal structure less than a hundred yards away—Kane's palace.

Men were swarming out the doors of the palace now, Kane's personal guards and underlings. The echoes of the tremendous explosion were still reverberating in the air, and the orange flame was spreading sheet-like over the adjoining buildings to the atomic plant.

And then, in the inky murk above, the first shell from Dorne's two atomic cannons burst deafeningly, followed by the sound of wild yelling, and the splatting of atomic rifles from the walls!

It had been almost a minute since the last of the guards had dashed from Kane's palace. And now Jon started across the street, after having divested himself of the encumbering folds of the thick gray shroud. His disintegrator pistols were in his hands, and he was sprinting up the steps of the palace, as a

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guard, crimson-clad and sleepy-eyed, burst through the door. Jon fired once, and on the run. The guard grabbed at his seared chest and tottered headlong down to Jon's feet. Then Jon was through the door, and into the palace. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

Kane Again

JON raced along the smooth metallic floors of the wide first floor corridor of the palace. There was a huge door at the end of the corridor, in front of which stood a startled, crimson-tunicked sentry.

The fellow had only time to decide to halt Jon, and to raise his atomic rifle to his shoulder, before twin blasts from Jon's disintegrator pistols sent him screaming in death agony to the floor.

Jon threw a big shoulder against the door, wrenching hard on the thick knob, and an instant later almost hurtled into the room from the momentum of his entry.

There were two men there. One, garbed in a rich purple tunic, sat behind a large glassicade desk. The other, crimson-clad, but bespangled, had been standing in front of him. The latter whirled, lips drawn back in astonishment.

Jon's disintegrator pistols burned him to the floor.

The man in the rich purple tunic behind the desk shouted something and rose to his feet. His huge body and cruelly handsome features marked him as no one but King Kane!

"What in the hell is—" thundered Kane wrathful, shaken.

"Shut up, Kane," Jon snarled. He waved his disintegrator pistols ominously. "Move out from behind that desk, you murdering swine!"

Slowly, face white with rage and shock, Kane did as he was told. His big hands, hanging at his sides, knotted into fists of fury. His mouth worked as he fought for words.

"You're going to die, Kane!" Jon spat the words. And Kane's eyes flicked in terror to the pistols Jon held.

"But not with these," Jon snarled. Suddenly he hurled the two pistols from him, through the corridor door which was still ajar. Then cat-like, he leaped to the door and slammed it, locking it before his adversary was aware of what he had done.

"Now!" Jon snarled, moving in toward Kane.

Suddenly the huge killer grinned.

"You damned fool," he grated. "You damned fool. I'll make you regret this!" He moved slowly forward.

Jon drove in suddenly and with whirlwind speed, his shoulder crashing into Kane's great thighs with piston-like power, spilling his opponent back to the floor.

Atop Kane now, Jon wrenched hard on the huge killer's right arm, bending it back with all his strength. But Kane's resistance stiffened, and his big body suddenly came to life as he forced his arm back toward Jon with incredible strength.

ONE foot came up suddenly, catching Jon in the groin and hurling him sickeningly backward from his opponent. Then Kane was on his feet, and Jon was sickly trying to come up from the corner where he'd been hurled by the driving blow.

Kane moved warily in on Jon, now, and suddenly launched his tremendous bulk in a dive at his floored opponent. Jon had time to twist swiftly to one side, slightly out of the path of Kane's body. And in an instant, his arm was wrapped around the killer king's head,

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twisting savagely as Kane rained blows furiously against his sides.

Slowly now, gritting his teeth against the pain and effort it was costing, Jon was working his way to his feet. He kept his grip around Kane's head and neck, biting deep into his underlip as one of his ribs snapped beneath Kane's blows.

Then Jon was standing almost straight. And suddenly, he jerked savagely in the opposite direction to which Kane's neck resistance had been applied. The result was a sudden horrible scream from Kane, and the sound of a neck bone breaking clean!

Kane's scream gurgled bloodily to an end. And his huge hulk went limp in death, as Jon stepped aside letting Kane's body slide to the floor.

Jon had been oblivious to everything save the struggle. And now, he realized that heavy blows were raining on the thick door of the room. Jon wiped the sweat from his eyes, dazed by the exertion and the pain of his crushed ribs.

Kane's men were battling to get in at him. Jon grinned savagely, twistedly, and wiped a hand across his wet mouth. His hand came away bloody. Suddenly Jon stepped forward, then pitched headlong to the floor. As blackness engulfed him, Jon realized with his last ebbing consciousness that Maydo was right, that this was a suicidal task. He wouldn't return. Kane's men were almost in the room. He had his vengeance—but he'd never have Maydo.

DORNE, from where he'd been kneeling beside the small cot, turned to Maydo.

"He'll pull through," he said. "Lungs not punctured by his ribs. Can be mended. He has incredible strength, and an amazing will to live."

The lovely dark-haired girl, wearing a silver tunic instead of the gray cowl shroud she'd doffed hours before, moved over beside the heavily bandaged figure on the cot. Her gray eyes were moist.

"You're all right, Jon Vance," she said softly. "We succeeded. Dorne's men found you in Kane's palace."

Jon Vance blinked his eyes.

"Does he understand me?" Maydo asked Dorne.

Jon Vance, with what little strength he had left, reached out and found Maydo's hand.

Dorne smiled.

"Obviously, he does," he answered.

"They didn't get through the door, Jon," Maydo said, putting her free hand to his forehead. "Father had tricked Kane. He'd constructed a battering ray machine that blew up on Kane's mobs and annihilated them almost completely. It was easy for us to mop up. We came here, then, and threw in our strength with Dorne."

Brannigan had just tiptoed into the room with elephantine quiet.

"Did you tell him?" the big redhead hissed at Maydo.

Maydo didn't look up. She kept her eyes on Jon's.

"Our women and children and old are free. And more than that, Jon, father has found a way out of this fourth dimensional universe. He's been working on it all the time Kane thought he was devising a battering ray machine. He's discovered another Door—the door to a fifth dimensional world, Jon! It's a place of grassy meadows, glorious sunshine, incredibly beautiful—"

Brannigan cut in again.

"Hell," he hissed, "he can find out that later. Tell him what counts!"

Maydo smiled up at the hulking redhead. Then down at Jon. She blushed faintly, then said:

"It will be a beautiful place to begin a new life, Jon, with the girl you want."

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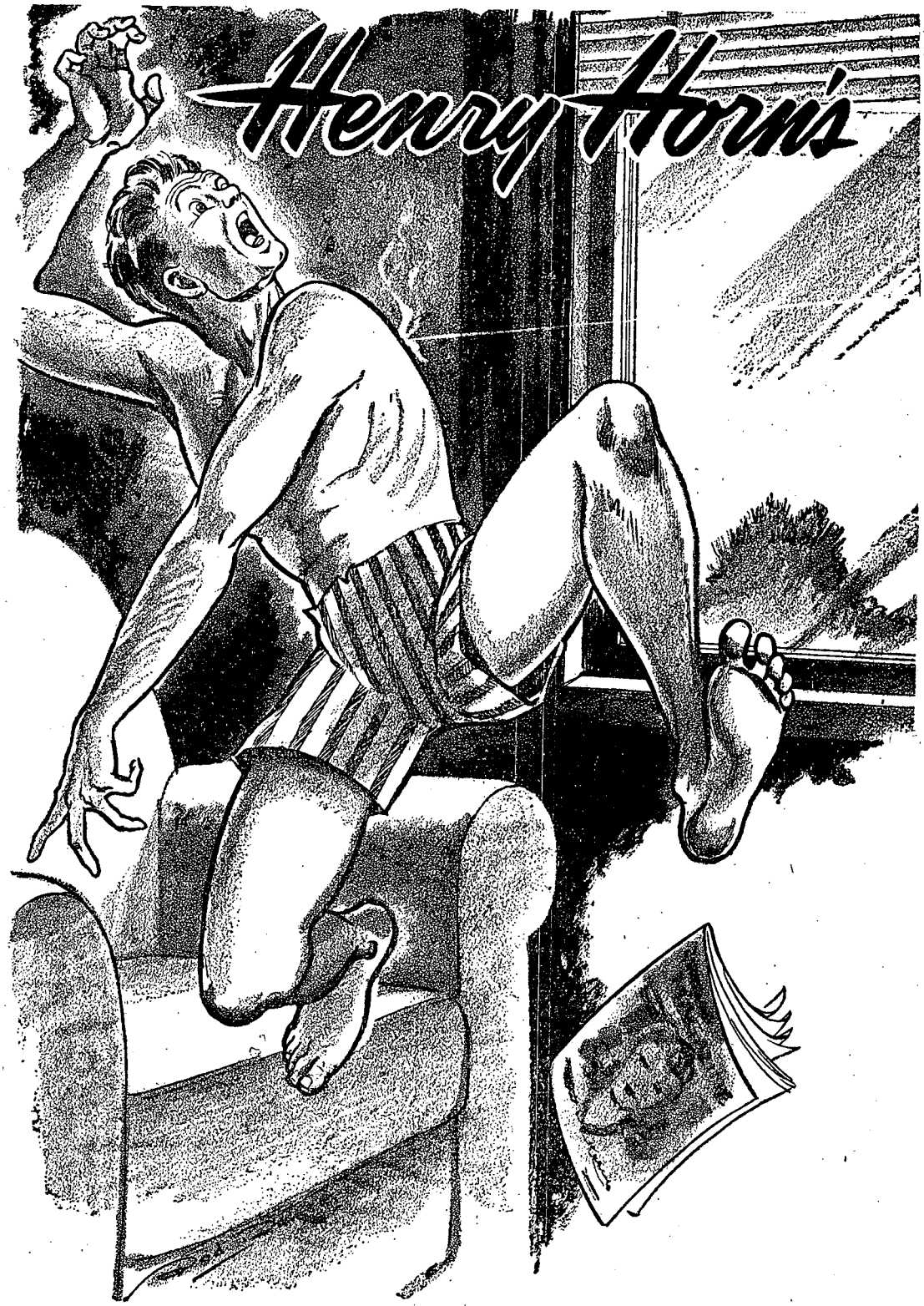

Joseph Paulsen leaped into the air with a painful bellow

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Racing Ray

by
DWIGHT V. SWAIN

Henry Horn had a peach of an invention this time. It was a ray that stung like a bee—and he had a profitable use for it!

"OUCH!" bellowed Professor Joseph Paulsen. Simultaneously his lank, near-naked body exploded out of the armchair's depths in a truly remarkable demonstration of neuro-muscular coordination. Bleary-eyed and befuddled—he had been dozing—the professor half-reeled across the room, there to lean against the wall, gasping, while he gathered his scattered wits.

Suddenly the tall scientist tensed. His keen eyes caught a flick of movement at the lower edge of the special quartz glass window in front of which he had been napping while enjoying his afternoon sun bath. Hitching up the shorts which were, at the moment, his only garment, he tiptoed back and peered out cautiously.

There, crouched on the porch floor close against the siding, and trying desperately to smother frame-racking spasms of laughter, huddled a small, familiar figure. An object resembling an oil can with a gaspipe sticking out one end lay near at hand.

Professor Paulsen's lips compressed into a thin, irritated line. His left hand whipped open the window with a single jerk. His right streaked out and down like a striking cobra, to catch his friend and partner, Henry Horn, firmly by the nape of the neck.

"Help!" squealed the squirming Henry, clawing frantically. "Let me go, Joseph. Let me go!"

Instead, the professor dragged the little man bodily through the open window into the room.

"Well?" he demanded savagely. "What have you to say for yourself?"

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Henry nervously licked his lips, his scraggly goatee waggling uneasily with each tongue-flick. With trembling fingers he adjusted his steel-rimmed glasses, twisted askew across his face in the struggle.

"Well?" persisted the other, still not relaxing his grip.

"Really, Joseph, I can't imagine what you're talking about," Henry protested, his face and voice twin studies in exaggerated innocence.

"No, of course not," sneered the professor. "You just happened to be studying the paint on the porch floor at the moment that double-barreled wasp, or whatever it was, stung me." He paused to shake Henry vigorously. "Now, you little blemish on the escutcheon of science, tell me the truth before I shake your teeth out!"

"Honestly, Joseph, you're doing me an injustice—"

"The truth, I said! I'm in no mood to listen to your preliminary evasions. If I can't even enjoy an afternoon sun bath, after spending six months' pocket money on a quartz glass window so I'd get the full benefit of the ultra violet rays, I want to know it."*

Again Henry licked his lips.

"But I didn't intend to hurt you, Joseph, really I didn't. I just had to be sure it would work, and after all, you can't be sure a guinea pig will react the same as something bigger, and—"

"Now," interrupted his partner, "we're getting somewhere. What's this 'it' you mention?"

"My new ray," bubbled Henry excitedly, goatee quivering with enthusiasm as he forgot his panic. "It's morvelous! We'll be rich, Joseph! It really works!"

"If you tell me you've been fooling around with that crazy 'death ray' that taught all our guinea pigs birth control, Henry, I refuse to accept responsibility for anything I may do to you as a consequence."

"Oh, no, no, it isn't that," denied his partner. "This is something different. I just invented it. I've been working on it ever since you told me we'd go to Lexington for our vacation this year. That's why I call it the racing ray."

"I guess I must be slipping," confessed the professor sadly, "but, frankly, I haven't the slighest idea of what you're talking about."

It was Henry's turn to sneer.

"Really, Joseph, you can be terribly stupid sometimes," he admonished. "It's perfectly clear. If we go to Lexington, we'll attend the races. And with this new ray of mine, we can decide for ourselves what horse we want to win, and bet on it, and make a lot of money. We may even make enough so we can quit raising guinea pigs. Ugh! I'm so sick of taking care of them I don't know what to do. And I don't care if it is a vital contribution to science to supply them to laboratories to experiment on!" He wrinkled his nose in disgust until the steel-rimmed glasses slipped down two notches and nearly went off the end.

"And what makes you think this ray of yours is going to win races, may I ask?"

Henry beamed.

"Don't you see? If it made you jump like you did, just think how fast it will make a horse run. We can't help but win!"

FOR a long moment Professor Paulsen stared out the farmhouse win-

* Ultra violet rays, and rays in the same vibratory wave-length, cannot pass through ordinary glass, which halts their progress by complete reflection. Thus, it is necessary to use a glass formulated of basic materials not resistive to ultra violet in order to acquire a sun-tan without being in the open air.—Ed.

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dow, off over the green hills that surrounded their tiny country place. There was a far-away look in his eyes. His grip on Henry's neck relaxed and he pushed the little man gently into the old armchair. Then, breaking off his reverie, he stalked back and forth across the room, hands locked behind him, his forehead wrinkled by a frown.

"Henry," he said finally, voice pained, "don't you see the fallacy of what you're proposing?"

His partner stared up at him in obvious puzzlement.

"There isn't any fallacy, Joseph. It works. You know that. If you were a horse and you got stung like you just did, wouldn't you run?"

The professor shook his head.

"That's not what I mean, Henry. I'm not denying this ray of yours probably could make horses win races." He paused in his pacing to stand before his friend. His tall, somewhat stooped figure hunched forward even more than usual as, running his long fingers through his graying hair, he tried to make his point clear: "The object of a horse race is to determine which horse can run fastest under given conditions. To dope a horse so he'll run faster or slower, or to use an electric quirt, or to plug his nostrils with sponges so he can't get enough air to run his best, are both legally and ethically wrong."

"Oh, I know that," the other agreed airily, his goatee at its most cheery and confident angle. "But horse races all are crooked anyhow, so I don't see why we shouldn't win all our bets if we can."

Professor Paulsen straightened with something of a sigh.

"You're probably right," he nodded. "I suppose it's rather silly to have any scruples. Because he can get away with it, Hitler undoubtedly is justified in trampling on anyone who gets in his way. Dillinger was on the right track when he robbed and murdered his way to the rank of Public Enemy Number One. The swindler who sells fraudulent oil stock to unsuspecting widows will agree heartily with your point of view." He nodded vigorously again. "Yes, Henry, I guess I'm just an old fogey who hasn't kept pace with the modern viewpoint. But, despite all the arguments on your side, I'd still rather keep on raising guinea pigs for a living then retire on money won by fixing races. I haven't any right to hamper you, though. You've worked hard for a long time, and I don't blame you for wanting a little luxury and ease. You go right ahead—"

"Stop it, Joseph, please stop." Henry's lower lip was quivering and his eyes were big and doleful. "I guess I just don't understand anything," he went on miserably. "You always have to lead me around. But really, I didn't mean to do anything wrong." He sniffled a little. "I guess I'm an awful problem."

Professor Paulsen sat down on the arm of the chair and patted his partner on the back. "Forget it," he advised. "We all get off on the wrong track sometimes. And even I will have to admit you had quite an idea in that ray of yours."

His little friend brightened visibly. "You really think so, Joseph?" Then: "But I won't use it. You don't have to worry. We can have more fun if we *don't* know which horse is going to win."

"AND this, Anne, is my partner and best friend, Henry Horn," introduced Professor Paulsen. "Henry, my niece, Anne Cortney. Her horse, Green Eyes, is running in the second race tomorrow."

"How do you do?" murmured Henry,

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speaking very carefully and politely in his best company manner. His eyes were wide and almost awed as he took the girl's proffered hand.

"I'm so glad to be able to meet you in person after all these years, Mr. Horn," Anne told him, with a smile that almost out-shone the rippling Kentucky sunlight. "Uncle Joe always mentions you in his letters." She motioned forward the two young men who flanked her. "This"—indicating the one on her left—"is Jerry O'Hara, who trains my horses. And this"—touching the arm of the man to her right—"is Ralph Grubner, one of my very special friends."

All were standing in the cool strip of shade beneath the stable eaves. Green hills undulated from the boundaries of the yard for as far as the eye could see, their symmetry accentuated rather than broken by the darker green of the trees that marked the occasional wandering lanes and by the white of the immaculate board fences. Especially from here, where they could glimpse the mellow, aging farmhouse and could hear the occasional whinnyings of the thoroughbreds within the stable, the vista was the very embodiment of the Bluegrass country.

But to Henry, all else was subordinate to Anne herself. He stared in obvious mute adoration at her naturally-blonde beauty and smooth, shapely face and even shapelier figure. His aging eyes caught every sparkling twinkle of her laughing blue eyes, every configuration of her ripe, red lips. And, above everything, the little man caught the clear spark of sincere friendliness that eddied through her voice, glance and manner.

Jerry O'Hara was a stocky, good-natured young Irish-American, distinguished chiefly for an unmanageable mop of copper-red hair. Somewhat silent, he plainly worshipped the ground on which Anne Cortney walked.

Grubner, by way of contrast, was dark and pin-neat, yet with a certain polished hardness about him. He, too, was perpetually attentive to the girl's every move.

PROFESSOR PAULSEN'S voice broke through Henry's reverie.

"How are Green Eyes' chances tomorrow?" he asked O'Hara.

O'Hara turned to the horse's stall, only a few feet from them. "That I can't tell you, sir," he confessed ruefully, caressing the chestnut's silky face. "I think they're good, myself, but there're some beauties entered."

"They'd better be good, Jerry," laughed Anne, a note of strain somehow tinging her gaiety. "You know what happens to the old family manor if Green Eyes loses."

"Nonsense!" Grubner interrupted. "Green Eyes is a cinch to win. Half the experts are favoring him." He paused to send a warm, protective smile toward the girl. "And you certainly never need to worry about finances so long as I've got two nickles to jingle together."

A slight blush tinted Anne's cheeks at this turn in the conversation. Professor Paulsen promptly intervened.

"Besides, you shouldn't undermine your horse's self-confidence by talking about the possibility of his losing," he chimed in. "Green Eyes hasn't any doubt about who's going to win, have you, fellow?"

The chestnut whinnied loudly in reply and the little group broke up, still laughing.

"Well, Henry, how do you like my niece?" the professor asked as the two friends walked away together.

"She's lovely!" breathed Henry, almost in reverence. "Why didn't you

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ever tell me about her before, though, Joseph?"

His friend shrugged boney shoulders.

"Guess I just never got around to it. Her mother—my sister—married a southerner and moved out of our part of the country, so I haven't been able to keep too close track of that branch of the family."

"Did she mean it when she said that about losing the old family manor if Green Eyes didn't win?"

The professor laughed.

"That was a figure of spech, Henry. Though I don't doubt but that she does need the money. Her father died last year, and her mother was already gone, so keeping the place together is all her responsibility."

"But, then," Henry recalled happily, stroking his gray whiskers, "that young Mr. Grubner said he'd take care of things."

The other frowned.

"That I don't like," he declared. Anne's too nice a girl to tolerate a shifty-looking character like him."

Henry looked up, wide-eyed.

"Why, Joseph, I liked him. I thought he was nice. What's wrong with him?"

"Nothing I can put my finger on," Professor Paulsen confessed, "but there's something off center about him. He shakes hands like a snake might if it had hands. His manners are too good . . . "

"That's not like you, Joseph," his partner chided. "You always tell me never to let my prejudices influence my judgment."

"Nevertheless, I still don't like him," grumbled the professor.

STUMBLING as the late afternoon sun blinded him, Henry felt his way around the corner of the Cortney stables to Green Eyes' stall. He was reaching up to pat the horse's sleek neck when the voices drifted into his consciousness.

"Will he win, Jerry?" came Anne's anxious query.

"I wish I could say for sure, Anne," Jerry replied. "With luck, he will. Without it . . . "

"He's just got to, Jerry. If he doesn't . . . "

"I know. You'll be through."

The sound of Anne's quiet sobbing tore at Henry's heart-strings. Then:

"It isn't the loss that matters. I don't care about that, Jerry, honestly I don't. But to see us all split up, going out into the world alone . . . and the horses being sold to the highest bidders, after I've seen them grow up from little colts . . . and you boys, so loyal, not asking wages all these months . . . oh, Jerry, I just can't stand the thought of it!"

"Don't worry, Anne. We'll work it out somehow," Jerry soothed. "'Odds are that you're wasting your tears. Green Eyes probably will win anyway." He hesitated. Then: "But . . . but if anything does happen, Anne, I wish you wouldn't talk about us all going off alone. I know I don't amount to much, but I'd like to take you with me. I swear I'd take good care of you—"

On the other side of the partition Henry slapped his thigh, wagged his goatee vigorously.

"I'll say Green Eyes is going to win," he muttered. "Ethics! Hmmphh!"

Later, when Anne had gone, he approached Jerry.

"I s'pose, you'd do almost anything to help Green Eyes win this race," he commented in the course of conversation.

"Anything honest," the trainer agreed. "I'd almost be tempted to leave off the 'honest,' only I know Anne wouldn't want to win any other way." He paused, eyed Henry soberly. "No,"

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he decided finally, "even if Anne didn't care, I guess I couldn't frame a race. Horse racing is too fine a sport to dirty up with anything crooked, even though a lot of people don't seem to feel that way about it. Besides, a fixed race isn't fair to the horses, and I'm not trying to be funny. A good horse will run his legs off and his heart out in order to win a race. That's why I can't see framing it so that any but the best horse wins.' '

Henry swallowed hard and studied the floor intently.

"Yes, yes," he agreed feebly. "Everything you say certainly is true, Jerry."

But, thrusting all qualms of conscience aside, he immediately procured the materials for and constructed a lead-sheathed ray-tube similar to the one with which he had "stung" the professor. One end of this tube he sealed. The other he equipped with the shutter from an old camera.

Then he went to the bank.

THE next morning he sought out Ralph Grubner.

"I want to know how to place a bet on Anne's horse," he explained.

"Take care of it for you myself," Grubner told him affably. "How much you want to lay down? A fin, maybe?"

Henry peered at him over the tops of his steel-rimmed glasses.

"A what?"

"Five dollars, Mr. Horn."

"Oh, no. Much more than that, Mr. Grubner. I want to bet $700."

"Whew!" Grubner whistled his astonishment, then inspected Henry with new interest. "Where'd you get it?" he demanded.

"Out of the bank," snapped the little man, somewhat nettled. "Joseph and I have a joint savings account."

"And does the professor know you're doing this?"

"Really, I don't see why you should be so curious. And what if Joseph doesn't know? It's my money as much as it is his. Besides, he'll never know a thing about it until the race is over and the money's back, along with our winnings."

Grubner was thoughtful.

"What makes you so sure Green Eyes is going to win?" he probed.

"Oh, I just know he will," retorted Henry with elaborate calm. "Er . . . uh . . . all the experts are backing him, too."

"Somehow," Grubner declared pointedly, his eyes gimletting the little man, "I can't figure you betting good money on a horse race without any better reason than a bunch of phoney 'experts' opinions. How about giving me the cold turkey on the deal?"

They argued for five minutes, Henry protesting innocence, Grubner shrewdly picking these statements to pieces. Finally the diminutive scientist cracked.

"It's my invention," he confessed. "That's what makes me so sure Green Eyes is going to win. Really, it's marvelous!"

"Invention? What is it, a new kind of ouija board?"

"Well, young man! You've certainly got a lot of nerve, comparing my invention to a ouija board. After all, rays are scientific—"

"Rays?"

Irritated beyond caution, Henry elaborated. Grubner continued to sneer.

"You think you can sting a horse enough to make him win a race? Don't be silly, chum!"

"It's not silly!" Henry insisted, chin and goatee sticking out in aggressive indignation. "I can prove it. I've got everything all fixed right over at my room."

The other thoughtfully gnawed his

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lip.

"Tell you what," he proposed. "Let's take this tube of yours out to a practice track a friend of mine owns. You can prove whether or not it works."

"Oh, that's fine!" agreed Henry, eyes sparkling with almost childish enthusiasm. "And on the way you can help me place my bet on Green Eyes. That shows how sure I am my ray will work."

"TRY it on Eucalyptus, over there," Grubner suggested an hour later as they stood beside the unpainted fence of a down-at-the-heels practice track. He indicated a sorry-looking nag, already showing signs of sway-back, which was wobbling feebly down the course. "If you can give him a new set of legs, even I'll think you've got a good thing."

"Gladly," beamed Henry, goatee at its most pert and cheerful angle. Resting the lead-wrapped tube on the fence-post beside him, he sighted down it as if it were a revolver barrel. His scrawny fingers gripped the cable release designed to click the shutter and open the tube, so that the ray could sear its way through the atmosphere to its goal abaft Eucalyptus' beam.

Clop-clop, clop-clop, clop-clop; Eucalyptus was almost abreast them, slouching along with something of the air of the hobo who isn't in a hurry to get to a given point because he didn't have any reason for wanting to go there in the first place.

"Wait'll he's past us," advised Grubner. "We want him to run, not shy off and slam the fence." He gripped the rails and hunched forward almost eagerly, as if a little of Henry's intensity had communicated itself to him.

Neck stretched out like a turkey-buzzard preparing to plummet, hands trembling as he lined up the tube, Henry did not pause to answer. Slowly he teetered around the post.

Then, when Eucalyptus was well past them, broad posterior the outstanding anatomical feature, Henry fired.

The sound erupting from Eucalyptus' shocked vocal cords was closely akin to that of rusty nails being torn with a claw-hammer from the two-by-fours in which they have been embedded for twenty years. Momentarily the horse's front feet stopped, while the hind legs kept on traveling. There seemed to be some question in Eucalyptus' mind as to whether to sit down on the spot, buck like a Wyoming bronco, or turn around and battle it out with Henry and Grubner. Suddenly he reached a decision. He took off down the track as if shot from a catapult.

"My God!" screamed Grubner, twisting his hat to shreds. "Look at 'im go!"

The jockey's surprise was so great he let go the reins, wrapped both arms around Eucalyptus' neck, and was halfway through the 23rd Psalm before the horse—on his second round of the track—decided to slow down again.

"Well?" demanded Henry, narrow chest puffed out like a pouter pigeon's, voice shrill and arrogant with triumph.

Grubner threw the remains of his hat to the ground.

"This is my turn to eat crow, chum," he declared. "That ray is all you said it was, and then some." He hesitated, pursed his lips. "Can't use it that way, though. Somebody'd catch wise sure. Can't you dream up some way so we can handle it under cover?"

"Oh, I've already thought of that," chortled Henry happily, cocking his head to peer impishly at the other. "Really, I'm 'way ahead of you, Mr. Grubner. I brought a big old pair of binoculars along to see the races with.

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I'm just going to solder this tube in the lower half of one of the barrels. Then, while I'm pretending to watch the race, I can be sighting on Green Eyes. When I want him to run faster, all I have to do it press the cable release button."

"That's swell," enthused Grubner. "And say, while you're at it, line up some cross-hairs on the lens, will you? We don't want to hit the wrong horse with this stingaree."

"HENRY," asserted Professor Paulsen, "you're as jumpy as a 30-year-old bride. What's gotten into you?"

Wide-eyed innocence radiated from behind the other's steel-rimmed glasses. The goatee assumed its most deaconly angle.

"Nothing at all, Joseph," he reassured. "I haven't invented anything new since we got here, and—"

A knock at the door interrupted him. Ralph Grubner and a squat, unpleasant-looking young man walked in.

"Get it all fixed, chum?" Grubner demanded.

"Ssshh!" hissed Henry, his teeth castanetting at the awful thought of Professor Paulsen's discovering what he had been up to. His warning was too late.

"Have you got what ready, Henry?" his partner queried, stepping out of the bathroom.

"My binoculars, Joseph," gulped Henry, breathing a frantic mental prayer. "I'm going to loan them to Mr. Grubner." He hurried to drag the ancient glasses from where they were hanging in their case in the closet.

"They're all set?"

Henry nodded mutely. Instantly Grubner snatched them away from him. After a moment of checking on the manner in which the little scientist had mounted the cable release, he turned to his companion.

"Okay, Tony," he ordered. Tony promptly produced a flat, ugly-looking automatic and pointed it at Henry and the professor.

"Well!" exclaimed Professor Paulsen, piercing first one intruder and then the other with an icy glance. "And may I inquire as to just what is going on here?"

"Your chum can tell you everything, professor," smirked Grubner. "He was in on it."

"Oh, Henry!" The professor sighed his despair. "What have you gotten into now?"

Henry drew his head down between his thin shoulders and swallowed hard.

"Well, Henry?"

"Oh, Joseph, I'm so sorry. I—I told Mr. Grubner about my ray, and—"

"He not only told me about it," reported Grubner, grinning evilly, "he told me he was going to use it to queer the race today. And he built the ray-tube into these field-glasses."

"If that's the case," said Professor Paulsen, eyeing him coldly, "I hardly see the necessity for this gunplay. You know the ray exists; you know that poor, misguided Henry, here, is going to use it to make Green Eyes win. So why should you interfere?"

"Because," snickered the young hoodlum, "I don't want Green Eyes to win."

"You don't want Green Eyes to win?" ejaculated Henry and the professor in shocked chorus.

"No. The odds aren't nearly good enough to make it worth while. Green Eyes is favored already. By using the ray, I can bring in some crowbait nag and really clean up."

"But Anne!" wailed Henry. "She's got to win—"

"Why? If Green Eyes wins, Anne

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will be in the clear. She'll have all the long green she needs. I'll be just another guy. If he loses, Anne's broke. She'll need help—and you can bet I'll help her. Why, I'll be a cinch to marry her."

"Oh!" whispered Henry in tragic note. "Oh!"

Professor Paulsen supplied the text: "I had always been under the impression that the amoeba was the lowest form of animal life," he commented caustically, "but now I know how mistaken I was."

Grubner's grin did not fade. He hung the glasses around his neck, then opened the hall door.

"You can tell me the rest when I meet you in the country after the race," he told the professor. "I've got a nice quiet spot all fixed up for you two. 'Way back from the main roads, where you'll be safe.'"

"Get movin', you two," growled Tony, motioning with his gun. "I got no time to waste."

WIDE chinks in the siding through which streamed strips of the bright afternoon sunlight; a floor, stained with the grime of years and with a path scuffed into the wood between the rusty cookstove and the sagging kitchen door, a hair couch, jagged with now-free springs, stuffings spewed from a dozen breaks in the fabric—all combined to tell Henry and the professor that their temporary prison was an abandoned farmhouse.

"Oh, Joseph, *why* did I do it?" Henry sobbed for the hundredth time, again burying his face in his hands.

And for the hundredth time his partner reached over to pat him on the shoulder and vainly endeavor to comfort him.

For at least the fiftieth time, Tony banged his gun-butt on the rickety table beside which he sat and snarled:

"Will you two shut up? Yer gettin' on my nerves. Shut up, now, before I lose me temper!"

Suddenly all three jerked alert. A car was pulling up the narrow lane to the house. They heard voices. The professor hopefully eyed an eighteen-inch length of pipe laying close against one wall.

"No you don't!" snarled Tony. "One move from either of you an' I start shootin'!"

A moment later the door swung open. Gun-prodded, in walked Anne, cold with rage, and with her a fuming Jerry O'Hara. Behind them, revolver in hand, stalked Grubner. His face was dark with anger. He crossed the room in two steps. Seizing Henry's necktie, he yanked the little man from his seat on the ancient couch.

"So you double-crossed me!"

"M-m-m-e-e?" quavered Henry, squirming in panic.

"Who d'you think I'm talking about?" With a snarl of disgust, the hoodlum shoved the goateed little scientist back onto the couch.

"What's up, Grub?" Tony asked.

"This little rattlebrain pulled a fast one on me, that's what," erupted his chief. "Sold me on that phoney ray of his. I pressed the button. Then nothing happened!"

"Then our horse didn't win, boss?"

"No, you dope, our horse didn't win. Green Eyes won! And every nickle I could beg, borrow, or steal was on that other crowbait nag's nose, too!"

"That's at least one thing the professor, Henry, Jerry and I can be thankful for," Anne said brittilly from her position on the other side of the room.

"BUT I don't understand," gulped Henry. "I don't see what could

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have happened. The ray should have worked perfectly. You remember, I tested the tube just this morning, Mr. Grubner."

"At any rate," interceded Professor Paulsen, "the race is over now, so I take it we're free to leave." He rose from the couch.

"Then you take wrong," snapped Grubner, shoving him back and tossing the glasses, case and all, down beside him. "I had too much salted down on that race to lose." He slapped his revolver into its shoulder holster, paced the floor, nervously chewing his lip as he walked. At last he turned on Henry.

"Hand over those tickets on Green Eyes," he ordered, hand outstretched.

Shaking with fear, Henry obliged. The professor hunched forward in incredulity as he noted the denominations.

"Where did you get that much money to bet, Henry?" he demanded.

Grubner snorted.

"Didn't he tell you? He took everything in your joint savings account."

"Henry!"

"Oh, Joseph, I didn't mean to, really I didn't!" Too ashamed to say more, the little scientist huddled at the other end of the couch, a miserable, abject figure.

Now Grubner turned his attention to Anne and Jerry. Tony, ever watchful, still presided over the entire scene, automatic in hand.

"You," Grubner said to Anne grimly, "have a lot of friends. I don't think they'd like to have anything happen to you. You're going to write to them, telling them to dig up a hundred grand before morning."

"And if I won't?"

Her erstwhile "very special friend" shrugged.

"There's a nice, deep well out in the yard," he suggested.

Anne shuddered.

"All right," she agreed in a choked voice. "Where's some paper?"

"Don't bother, Anne," Jerry broke in.

"What—?"

The young trainer shook his head sadly. "It's no use, little one," he said gently. "We're done for, whether you get the money or whether you don't. This slimy rat is too familiar with the Lindbergh Law ever to let us leave here alive."

Henry's goatee and Adam's apple jerked as one.

"You don't mean . . ." he whispered hoarsely.

Professor Paulsen answered:

"Jerry's right, Henry. And there's not much of anything we can do."

Henry's under-lip quivered.

"Oh, Joseph, what have I done to you—to Anne—to Jerry?" he half-sobbed, his eyes big and frightened. Again the professor patted his shoulder.

"Don't worry, Henry," he advised. "You meant well, even though you didn't choose the best enabling mechanism for your worthy motives."

But now Jerry went on:

"Anyhow, Anne, just in case I don't get another chance to tell you . . . I love you, even if I never had a right to do it."

The girl stumbled toward him, clung to him, her face buried against his shoulder. His arms enfolded her in a vain effort to comfort.

OF them all, Professor Paulsen alone remained relatively calm and unperturbed. Now he picked up the binoculars, toyed with them, sighted through them, focused them, clicked the shutter.

"What a pity your invention didn't work out, Henry," he sighed to his companion. "All this trouble would

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have been eliminated."

"So what?" bit off Grubner, gnawing feverishly at his lip as the strain of this scene—and the bloody horror scheduled to come next—preyed on his nerves. "It didn't, and that's that." A pause. "Look, Tony, you keep these dopes covered. I'll go out and get the cover off that well . . ."

The professor raised the glasses to his eyes again, stared through them at Tony, who still stood stiff-legged and dangerous at the other end of the room, gun in hand.

Then, suddenly, the professor's fingers again tightened on the cable release. A strange silence seemed to grip the room as the shutter clicked.

"Help!"

It was Tony's voice, aflame with anguish. His body exploded into a spasm of flailing arms and legs. The automatic flew from his hand, crashed against a wall.

"Now!" shouted Professor Paulsen. He arced the heavy glasses to a thudding stop at the base of the gunman's skull. Tony's body slumped floorward.

Grubner's hand flashed toward his left armpit. Before he could snatch out the hidden gun, Jerry O'Hara had sidestepped from Anne's embrace to uncork a terrific right uppercut. Grubner, still bewildered, neglected to pull in his chin. Limp, dead to the world, he collapsed in the corner.

Jerry glanced ruefully over at the professor, rubbed his bruised knuckles.

"Be darned if I don't think I hurt my hand worse than I did his jaw," he grinned.

"Anne no doubt will provide first aid for that," chuckled the tall scientist, gathering up the two thugs' guns. His niece, her arms already encircling Jerry's neck, paused momentarily for an aside to her uncle:

"Will I ever!" she laughed.

"JOSEPH," piped up a meek, incredulous voice from behind the couch, "Joseph"—Henry clambered from his refuge—"how did you do it?"

"How did I do what?"

"How did you make my ray work, after Mr. Grubner wasn't able to?"

"And you have the colossal effrontery to refer to yourself as a scientist of sorts!" The professor's voice dripped sarcasm. "You, who devised that lunatic beam, can't even figure out its properties!"

"Honestly, Joseph—"

"Did it never occur to you, my esteemed colleague, that glass might interfere with your ray? All I had to do to make it work was to take the lens from in front of the tube."

"But that can't be it," Henry protested. "Remember, Joseph, it made you jump when I turned it on you that day when you were sitting in front of the window at home."

"There are times, Henry," purred the professor, "when your lack of common horse sense baffles even me. Doesn't a certain difference in situation penetrate your mind?"

"You mean . . . ?"

"I mean that the window at home is made of special quartz glass, so that I can get the benefit of the sun's ultra violet rays without going outdoors. Your ray, apparently, is akin to the ultra violet, at least so far as its penetration of ordinary glass is concerned."

For a moment the little fellow was downcast, his goatee hanging limp and dejected. Then his eyes lit on Jerry and Anne, still tight in each others' arms. He brightened.

"Well, Joseph," he decided finally, with his best judicial air, "perhaps I *should* have realized that the ray wouldn't pass regular glass. But even so, this is one time you can't say my invention didn't do someone some good."

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The Tenant on

The little man wasn't in the car when it got to the 14th floor

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the 13th Floor

By John York Cabot

Corny jokesters often asked for the 13th floor, but this one actually got off there!

IN MY business I have to put up with a lot. I meet a lot of screwy people and hear a lot of third-rate humor and fifth-rate weather reports. Sometimes it's, "How's business, Mike? Going up?" And other times it's, "Hot today, isn't it, Mike?" Or, "Think the rain'll go on all day?"

All very funny. All very interesting.

Sometimes, when the car is jammed with passengers, I think I'd like to run the elevator straight up through the top of the roof. Just for the hell of it. For you see, that's my racket—running an elevator in the Binx Building. And it is a most monotonous racket indeed. Up and down. Up and down. Lord, how I wish I could go sideways just once!

But that's because I'm probably going crazy. I'm not sure I am, mind you. But fifteen years of going up and down, up and down, for a living *might* have a bad effect on the brain tissues. And if *I'm* not crazy, then *someone* is. I'll let you decide that for yourself.

The first time I saw the little guy was on a dismal March morning. It was raining outside, and people clumped in an out of my car in muddy shoes and soggy clothes, smelling damp and trying to put out my eyes with umbrella points.

The little guy carried an umbrella. He wore a black derby and a high celluloid collar that protruded above the black, wet sheen of the rubber raincoat that hung around him. His feet were encased in a pair of galoshes, and he wore tortoise shell spectacles.

I had never seen him before, and I wouldn't have noticed him then, except for the fact that he noddded cheerfully to me as he stepped into the car. Generally only regular tenants of the building did that.

The car wasn't awfully crowded on this trip. Just about eight passengers including the little guy.

"Ten!" someone called.

"Eight!" someone else said.

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"Twenty-one!" said another voice.

I threw the lever forward and the car started up.

"Thirteen, please!" said a pleasant voice.

I'd heard that gag so often it wasn't funny any longer. Of course there was no thirteenth floor on the Binx Building. Like plenty of other big office buildings we just skipped the thirteenth floor; twelve, then fourteen, see?

I glared over my shoulder to see who the gagster was. The little guy was the only passenger smiling.

"What did you say?" I demanded.

"Thirteen, please," he answered.

I knew how to fix his clock. I'd done it to other funnymen who'd called for the thirteenth floor. Just ignore them when they asked for the floor they really wanted. Ignore them and ride them all the way up to the top.

I STOPPED at eight and two passengers got out. One got in. Then it was ten. Four passengers got out. I shot past twelve, then fourteen, stopped the car at sixteen and one passenger got out. Twenty was the top floor, and when I stopped the car there I turned around again, ready to give the little guy a so-yuh-thought-yuh-were-smart look.

But he wasn't there. The only passenger was a fat old dame. I blinked.

"Lady," I demanded, "what happened to the little guy who called for thirteen?"

She looked startled, wheeled around.

"Why," she gasped, then she wheeled back to face me, "he was standing right behind me. I'm sure he didn't get out!"

Our eyes met, and she stepped hastily out of the car as if it might suddenly fall from under her. I looked at the back of the empty car where the little guy should have still been standing. No holes in the floor. He hadn't dropped through.

"He *musta* gotten off at one of the stops!" I told myself. Running an elevator gets you that way. You begin to worry about such things.

The bell in the other shaft rang. It was my turn to start down again. But I looked very carefully at the blank gray wall between fourteen and twelve on the way down. And for the rest of the day it was somehow uncomfortable every time I'd pass the thirteenth floor that wasn't there.*

I was working the late shift that day, nine-thirty in the morning to seven at night. And at seventeen minutes to seven—you count the minutes that way when you're on the long shift and almost ready to go home—I picked up three of the scrub women on the sixteenth floor to take them down to the second.

Most of the offices in the building are closed by five o'clock, so the last two hours on the long shift aren't very busy and the cars are never crowded.

The scrub women had their pails and mops and stood near the back of the car chattering to each other as I took them down to the second. It was a quick trip, non-stop from the sixteenth down. Then I stopped the car

* Modern office buildings do not skip the 13th floor. However, there are many among those buildings more than fifteen years old, which do not have a 13th floor. It is amazing that hard-headed business people are still found who are so superstitious that they number floors in a large building so as to skip a number to which bad luck is generally attached. The truth is that most great tragedies, caused by fires and explosions, have occurred in office buildings *which had no 13th floor*. However, in order not to be superstitious on our part, it must be pointed out that modern buildings, possessing a 13th floor, are fireproof, and that factor alone accounts for the disasters' apparent selection of buildings without 13th floors since they are old and not constructed to eliminate fire menace as are the newest skyscrapers.—Ed.

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and they were pulling the pails and mops out. The buzzer on my board flashed to indicate another passenger was waiting up on the twentieth.

I slammed the door and started up.

"All the way down, please," said a pleasant voice.

Something at the nape of my neck got very chilly. I knew that voice. I stopped the car with a lurch and turned around.

The little guy stood in the back, smiling at me.

"All the way down, please," he repeated.

I swear that he hadn't gotten on at sixteen with the scrub women. And that was the only stop I'd made!

"Look," I said, and there was a croak in my voice. "Look, when did you get on?"

He smiled pleasantly. "At thirteen, of course."

Now that he'd told me, I wished he hadn't.

I PUT the car into motion very carefully. My nerves were screaming. We went down to the first floor. The little guy stepped out. I was trying to close my eyes against the sight of him.

"I had to work a little late tonight," he said.

"Did you now?" I answered carefully.

"Yes," he said. "But then, business is so good I shouldn't complain." He stood there, not making any move to walk out of the lobby, obviously making conversation.

"You have an office here?" I asked cautiously.

He smiled in that very happy way of his.

"Oh yes. Oh my yes." He laughed. "I've had an office here for almost twenty-five years now."

I'd been running elevators in the Binx Building for eight years. I'd never seen him until today. And yet he didn't *seem* to be playing the wise-acre.

"That's funny," I said in a sort of strained voice. "I've never seen you until today."

This didn't faze him.

"Of course not," he answered cheerfully. "Today is the first day I've ever used the elevators. Until today I always walked up."

"To the thirteenth floor," I said in a choked voice.

"Yes," he seemed happy to chatter, "thirteen flights of stairs are good exercise. Excellent exercise. Used to keep me in splendid condition. But of course," he gave an apologetic little laugh, "I believe I'm getting a little old for such strenuous exertion now. So today I used the elevator for the first time. I think I'll continue to do so."

This was more than I could take. He was really pulling my leg. I got a little sore. This was all nonsense. What could I have been thinking of?

"So you have an office here?" I asked nastily.

He nodded.

"On the thirteenth floor."

"Where's your firm name on the building directory?" I asked, pointing a finger at the directory board on the wall across from the elevators.

He stepped over to the board and pointed with a thin finger.

"Here," he indicated. "Right here."

I stepped out of the elevator and walked over beside him, squinting up at the spot at which he pointed. It was black and blank. Nothing was there. It was the empty space at the bottom of the "H" section.

"Listen," I snapped. "If you're trying to be wise—" and I glared down at him.

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He looked bewilderedly at me.

"It's right there," he said. "Z. Hobson & Company."

But it wasn't, of course. Yet the expression on his face was so sincerely *convincing*. Still it *wasn't* there!

He suddenly looked down at a big watch he'd pulled from his pocket. A watch with a huge, old-fashioned gold chain.

"My," he said. "Oh my, it's getting late. I must hurry, or I'll miss my supper." He smiled apologetically, tapped his black derby. "Goodnight," he said pleasantly.

I watched him walk briskly out of the building. Then I turned and looked at the spot on the directory to which he'd pointed. It was still blank. There wasn't any Z. Hobson & Company there.

WHEN the night man relieved me, ten minutes later, I went straight to the bar next door. I needed a few quick ones. My wife gave me hell when I got home groggy, of course, but I couldn't tell her the reason. I couldn't tell anyone. Up and down. Up and down. Up and down. Maybe I *was* going nuts.

And if I was going batty, the symptoms were still with me the next morning. For the little guy stepped into the elevator again, and again he nodded pleasantly. If the elevator hadn't been so crowded I think I'd have refused to take him up.

And it would have been better for me if I had refused. For the same damned thing happened again. He called for the thirteenth, while a chill ran up my spine. I didn't dare look at him as I made my stops all the way up to the fourteenth. But when I turned around to look at that stop—he wasn't there.

He hadn't gotten off at any of the previous stops. I know. I watched that door like a Junior G-Man. But he was gone!

And I took him down, around six o'clock, that evening. Took him down even though I *knew* he hadn't stepped into the car at any stop!

I was in no mood to make light talk with him that night. And I reeled in on my wife's cold dinner for the second night in a row. But I needed the alcoholic fortitude.

Obviously there was no thirteenth. I told myself this for the next two days. But for the next two days the little guy got on and off at the thirteenth floor. I wasn't sleeping nights. I was a wreck.

It was on the third evening, about six o'clock again, when I whipped past the gray wall where the thirteenth floor *wasn't* and I suddenly *felt* him standing in the back of the car.

I looked straight ahead. I didn't dare turn around. My voice must have been almost hysterical as I spoke.

"Look," I quavered. "Hasn't this been going on long enough?"

"Eh?" he said behind me. "I'm afraid I don't quite understand you."

"This thirteenth floor stuff," I blurted crazily. "You know there isn't any thirteenth floor!"

His voice was clearly bewildered as he answered.

"I'm afraid I really don't understand you. My office is on the thirteenth. I get on and off there."

His last sentence was the one I didn't care to face. It was *too* true. I was getting more than frantic.

"But the Binx Building doesn't *have* any thirteenth floor!" I wailed.

"Oh," said the little guy, and there was sudden understanding in his voice. "Oh, I see. You mean *actually* it doesn't."

He didn't add anything to that. That seemed to make it perfectly clear. Ha

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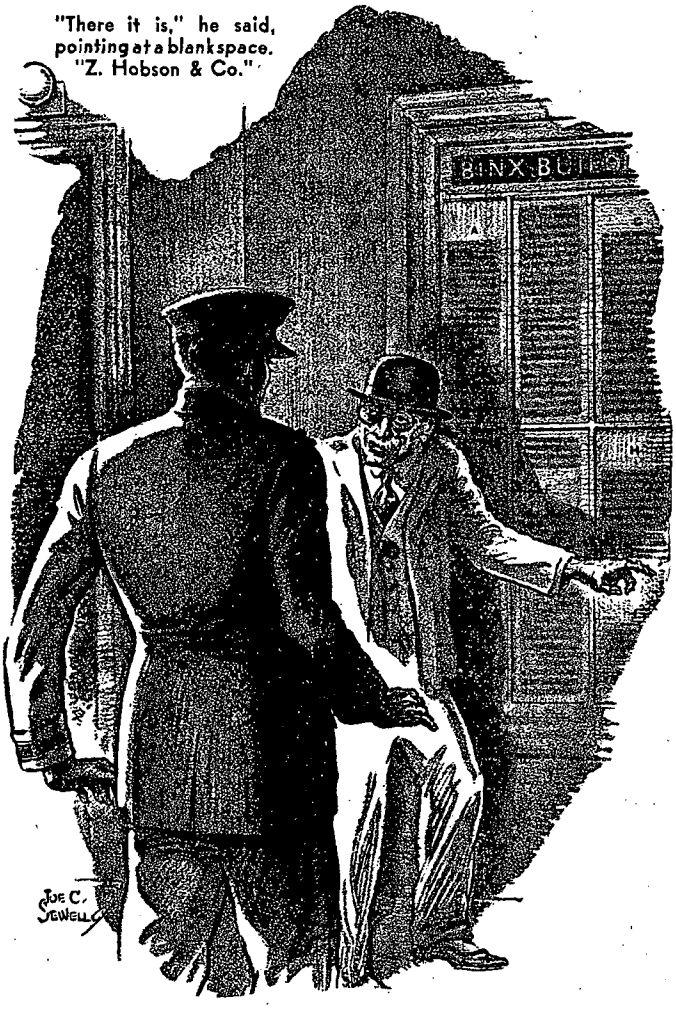
ha. It didn't *actually* have any thirteenth floor. Ha ha ha. Yes, indeed. That made it all right. I felt like gibbering wildly.

He suddenly spoke again.

"But I *do* save rent that way," he reflected.

I GOT the elevator down to the first floor before I lost control completely. I jerked the door open. I couldn't get him out of there soon enough.

He stepped out into the lobby and turned to make some nightly small talk. But I wasn't having any. I slammed the door and shot up as quick as I could. That night I got so drunk I told my wife. It didn't help. She just looked at me. When I reeled off to bed I heard her calling her mother's to find out if they had an extra room for her.



I came to work at the Binx Building the next morning resolved that it would be my last. I would quit as soon as the day was over. Enough was enough. Another day and they'd take me away in a steel-ribbed jacket.

But nine o'clock passed without the appearance of the little guy. Ten o'clock went by and I still hadn't seen him. At eleven he stepped into the elevator. He smiled pleasantly, touching his black derby.

"Have an extra heavy load for you today, Mike," he said.

I didn't answer. But I thought, my God has he got *friends?*

"I'm moving out," he went on. "Have to expand. Business is getting so very good I need new quarters."

I shut my eyes and shook my head hard. But he didn't disappear. Didn't disappear, that is, until the thirteenth floor. At least he must have disappeared. For he was in the car at the twelfth, and gone when I made the stop at the fourteenth!

And it was three trips later when I saw him again. I was going down, in an empty car, when suddenly the weight in the elevator was jolted. I noticed quickly that I'd just passed thirteen.

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Then I looked over my shoulder.

The little guy was there. And three big filing cabinets and a heavy old fashioned typewriter were also there.

"This is all I have to move," he said, smiling in that friendly dog way. "It's not too heavy. I telephoned for some movers to meet me in the lobby. They'll take it to my new offices."

"Your new offices," I managed to blurt, "will they be on, on, the—"

"On the thirteenth floor?" he finished my sentence. "Of course. The thirteenth is very lucky. I wouldn't have any other floor for my office."

"But there are no thirteenth floors in the business district of this town," I protested groggily.

He smiled again. "Not actually," he conceded. "But I've found one that will do, just a block from here, for a while. It's on the thirteenth," he finished.

AT LAST, thank God, we were down on the first floor. And there, so help me, were two burly, bearded, overall-clad moving men. They stepped into the car and lugged out the filing cabinets and the old typewriter. The little guy gave them a slip of paper and I suppose it had directions on it for delivery.

Then he turned to me, extending his hand.

"Goodbye, Mike," said the little guy beamingly. "It's been pleasant knowing you. If there's ever anything I can do for you, I wish you'd look me up. Here's my card, my, ah, business card."

He handed me a white pasteboard.

There was nothing on either side. I gagged.

"Wha—what's your business?" I managed to gasp.

I make invisible ink," he said. "Well, goodbye."

He turned then and marched out of the lobby, a little guy in a black derby hat and a high celluloid collar, whistling happily. The boss of the Z. Hobson Company, Invisible Ink.

That afternoon I caught the manager of the Binx Building. I wasn't going to quit, but I did need a vacation. The manager saw the color of my face and felt that I needed one too.

"Starting today?" I begged.

"Starting today," the manager agreed.

I started to turn weakly for the door. Then I stopped for a minute.

"Say," I demanded, "how long have you managed this place?"

The manager looked at me as if I were crazy.

"Fifteen years," he said.

"How long," I asked carefully, "has the Binx Building not had a thirteenth floor?"

The manager thought.

"About ten years," he answered.

"Who," I gulped, "was the last tenant on the thirteenth, before it was changed to the fourteenth?"

The manager frowned. After a minute he said:

"An old duck named Z. Hobson. A little fellow, as I remember, whose business was ah, let me see, oh yes—invisible ink. He died two days before we inaugurated the no thirteenth floor idea. Nice pleasant old duck."

I must have staggered for the door.

The manager called after me.

"Why were you so curious, Mike?"

"He just moved out today," I croaked.

"You take a nice long vacation, Mike," the manager said in sudden anxious solicitation. "I'm sure you'll straighten out."

Maybe he's right. Maybe I will.

I'm still on my vacation though . . .

THE END

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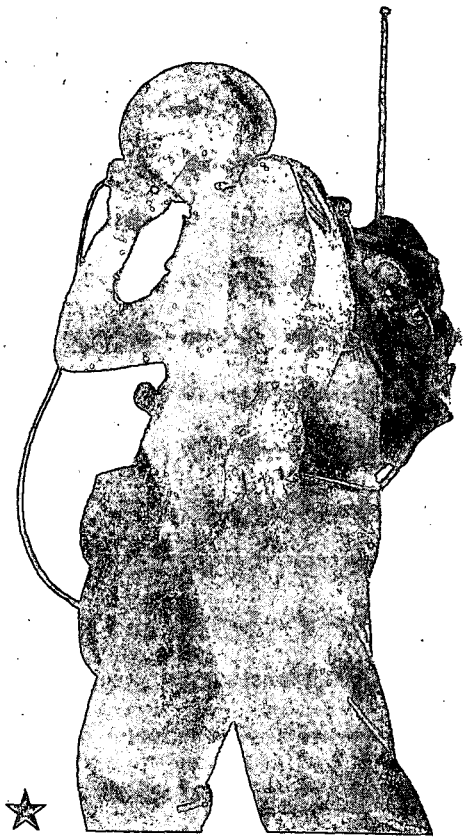

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The fly bumped repeatedly against the glass panes

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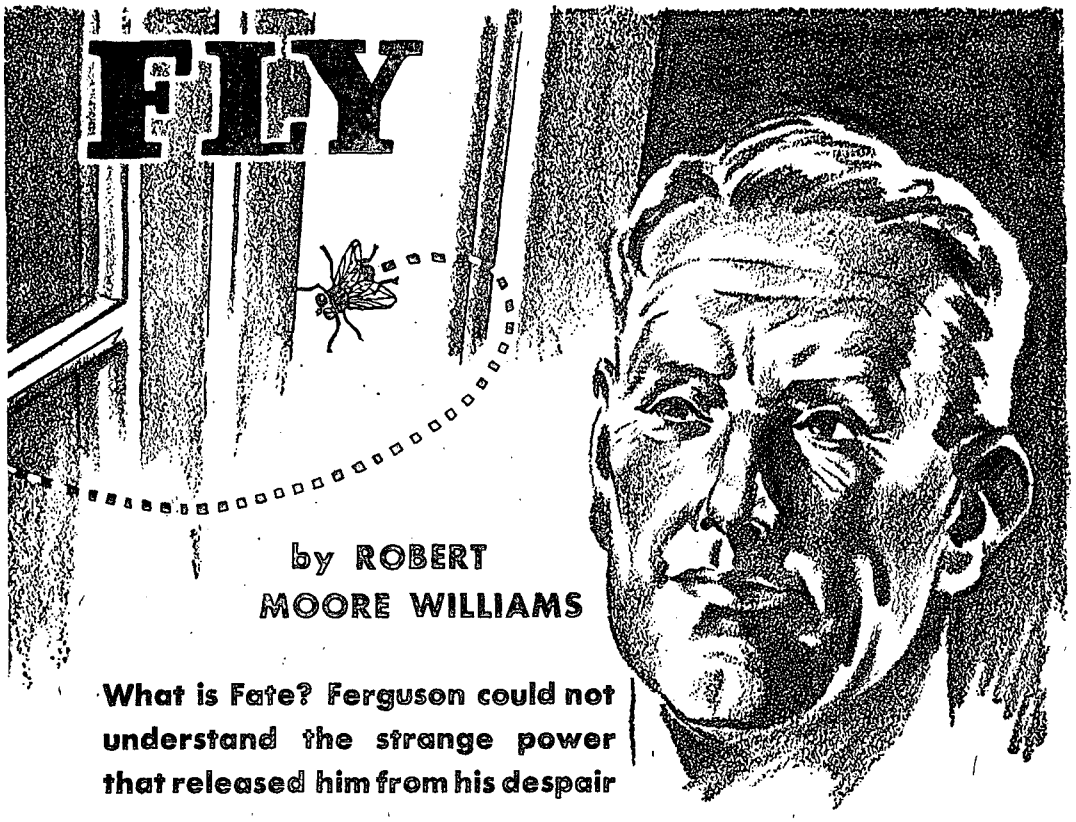
FLY



by ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

What is Fate? Ferguson could not understand the strange power that released him from his despair

ALL who knew John Ferguson agreed on one point—he was a tough-minded sceptic. It he met a ghost in the middle of the road on a dark night, he would begin examining it with that fine scientific curiosity that has put him where he is today.

It just wouldn't occur to him that he ought to be scared. There probably was only one time in his life when he was really scared, and that resulted from a set of such simple circumstances that nobody—except Ferguson—would have noticed what had happened.

The thing that scared him was a broken window cord.

But this story had better be told in the way he would tell it, in those rare instances when he is willing to talk about it at all.

It happened in 1932. Do you remember 1932? Really, no grass ever grew in the streets that year, but there were moments when things looked as if it would grow there. It was a bad year. A lot of people hope to God there is never another one like it. There will be, of course.

Ferguson was twenty-seven years old in 1932. Five years out of college, married, one baby. He was a chemist, and a good one. Five years had rubbed the college shoddy from him, put his feet on the ground, given him a sound knowledge of industrial practice. He had a good job with a big company, and even if there had been a couple of cuts in pay, he wasn't worried. He was simply too valuable a man for any company to let go. In the five years he had been with this company he had saved them ten times his salary.

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1932 didn't worry him, until it came.

Nobody knows how many really good men walked the streets in 1932. There must have been millions of them. Ferguson was one. His company had decided it could get along without chemists. This was damned foolishness, and it sent them into bankruptcy in the long run, but they tried it. That was in January. Ferguson didn't worry. With his background and ability, he would have another job in a week.

In July he had two dollars and eighteen cents left in his pocket.

He came dragging into the shabby apartment house that now was home, dreading the headshake he would have to give his wife. He had walked from one end of the city to the other that day. For months he had been willing to take anything he could get. "No help wanted. Sorry." Most of the time the employment managers didn't say they were sorry. They were, of course, but they couldn't afford to show it.

His wife saw at a glance he hadn't found a job. She kissed him.

"There will be something tomorrow," she said. "You must have hundreds of applications on file and a job is bound to turn up soon. It may be tomorrow," she said brightly.

Ferguson didn't say anything. He had seen too many yesterdays to have much faith left in any tomorrow.

She kissed him again. "You're tired. Why don't you go lie down while I start dinner?"

LYING on the bed, he could hear her banging the pots and pans around in the kitchen, singing as happily as she would have sung if she had had something to put into them.

A man can stand just so much, and no more.

He got up and closed the door.

He didn't sleep. He was too tired, too worn out, to doze. Also, he was hungry, had been hungry for months. With two dollars and eighteen cents in your pocket, you don't eat lunch.

He tried to decide what they were going to do. Of course, they could go and live with his folks or with his wife's parents. That was being done, in 1932. Probably no one wanted to do it. Certainly Ferguson didn't. But what else could he do?

Somewhere, off in the sky, he seemed to hear the drone of an airplane. Or it sounded like an airplane, except that it didn't go off into the distance. It kept hovering around, a dim distant drone that came from nowhere.

Ferguson has since wondered rather uneasily about that drone, wondered what it really was. At the time, it merely annoyed him.

There was something else that annoyed him more. A fly. It was caught between the shade and the upper pane of the window. Looking up as he lay on the bed, he could see its shadow on the window shade, a little black dot gyrating back and forth as the fly tried to escape from the room. The buzzing annoyed him.

Ferguson has never been able to evaluate that fly. He's thought about it too, following the various possibilities with his coldly logical mind. But the part it played in what happened, or whether it played any part—well, he just doesn't know. Logic says the fly had nothing to do with what happened, but logic also teaches him to distrust logic.

He watched the fly, thinking about it, wondering what it thought, or whether it thought at all. Its mental apparatus must be strictly limited. A few simple reactions, to enable it to seek food, to avoid enemies, and mate with its kind. No more. In the world of nature these were enough, but it had blundered into

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a house and had run into a pane of glass, something that didn't exist in nature and which the fly could not understand. It was not a housefly, it didn't belong inside, and it wanted to get out, would die if it didn't get out.

It seemed to be growing weaker. The seemingly endless gyrations had almost ceased. The fly hadn't given up the fight, but in spite of the best it could do, it was getting licked. Somehow this annoyed Ferguson. He got up and opened the window.

The fly flew away.

FERGUSON laid down again. He had the type of mind that is forever curious, and he kept wondering about the fly. It had absolutely no knowledge of him, didn't know that he existed. From its viewpoint, an opening had miraculously appeared, enabling it to escape. Of the forces that had operated to create that opening, it had—and probably could have—no knowledge. Its mind wasn't big enough to understand a world which included windows and men.

He must have dozed.

The next thing he knew his wife was in the room, shaking him, calling sharply, "John! Wake up!"

Her face was white and tense. She looked scared, and part of her fright was communicated with him.

"What is it? What's wrong? Has something happened to the baby?"

"You're wanted on the phone. Mrs. Jackson just rapped on the door and said you had a phone call. She's holding the wire. Hurry!"

Ferguson didn't have a phone. Mrs. Jackson, a neighbor, permitted him to leave her number with anyone who might need to call him. In 1932 people did things like that, and did them gladly.

He was off the bed and out of the room in an instant. He didn't know who was calling him. It might be anybody.

His hands were shaking as he picked up the receiver. He saw, out of the corner of his eyes, that his wife had followed him.

"Hello," he said.

"Hello. Is this John Ferguson?"

"Yes."

"This is the Axton-Bergen Chemical Supply Company, T. A. Bergen speaking. You may recall filing an application for a position as research chemist with us several months ago. Are you still interested in that position?"

Ferguson swallowed. His mouth was suddenly dry. He was so perturbed he couldn't speak.

He tried to shout, "Yes!" into the transmitter but his throat was so clogged he could only grunt.

"I don't understand you," the voice at the other end of the wire said. "We have an opening for a man with your qualifications. Of course, we will have to start you with a much smaller salary than you have been receiving, but the position offers excellent prospect for the future, if you're still interested."

"I'm interested," Ferguson croaked.

"Good. Come down in the morning and we'll talk it over."

Ferguson hung up the receiver just in time to catch his wife as she fell. She had fainted.

HE WAS down there early the next morning. The Axton-Bergen Company was a small concern. Mr. Bergen did the hiring and the firing. He hired Ferguson, and he thanks his lucky stars that he did.

Today, Ferguson is a partner in the concern. As a chemist, he is hard to beat, and he's doing very nicely. He's not wealthy yet, but his refinement of a manufacturing process has brought the Axton-Bergen Company plenty of busi-

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ness. He still has that keen, scientific mind, the type of mind that pursues—or tries to pursue—every thread of thought to it logical conclusion.

If he had not had this type of mind he would not have been so badly scared as he was the morning he first talked to Bergen.

The interview had reached a satisfactory conclusion. Ferguson was hired. But he kept looking at the pile of applications on Bergen's desk. There were hundreds of them, each one filled out by some man who wanted and needed a job.

"It's only curiosity on my part, Mr. Bergen," Ferguson asked, "but how did you happen to select my application from all that pile? Did you go through all of them and finally select the one that came nearest to the qualifications you needed or did you just pick out several that looked good and call until you got to me?"

Bergen was a round, plump little man. Frank and to the point. "There's a funny thing about that, Ferguson," he said. "Frankly, I didn't intend to call you. I didn't even remember your application was in the pile. I had so many applications to choose from—all of men able to handle the job—that I picked out several that looked good and lined them up to start calling them on the phone."

He paused, and Ferguson, seeing his hesitation, felt the first slight touch of coldness.

"What did you do?" he asked. "How did you happen to select my application."

Bergen twisted in his chair and looked up at the window. "I didn't do anything," he said. "I had the applications all ready to start calling when the top frame of the window fell. This is an old building and the window rope had rotted. Well, there hadn't been much wind yesterday, but just as the window fell, a big gust of air came blowing into the room. It blew the application sheets all over the place. When my secretary and I got them all straightened out again, yours was on top. Your record looked so good that I decided to give you a ring and see if you were still interested—what's the matter, man?"

FERGUSON'S face was milk white. He was staring at the window. The upper frame was held in place by a stick, the broken rope had not yet been replaced. The cord was hanging down beside the glass.

He could see that the cord was rotten. He could see where the strands had parted and frayed. Unquestionably the cord had merely rotted until it would no longer support the weight of the frame. The cord on the other side of the fame had been broken already. When the remaining rope had parted, the window had fallen.

The sight of that rotten window cord scared Ferguson worse than he had ever been scared before.

He kept wondering over and over again why it had broken at the exact moment when Bergen was ready to start calling men for the job? Why hadn't it waited until next week to break?

And the sudden gust of wind that had blown the application sheets all over the room—what of that wind? Had it somehow sorted the sheets so that his application came out on top? How—

Was it really a wind, or was it something else?

Ferguson doesn't know the answer to that question. But he does know he was scared, terribly. Not believing much in anything he can see, he wonders if he does believe in something he can't see.

He remembers that he opened a window, and a fly escaped from a trap. Another window opened, and he escaped

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from another but equally vicious trap.

No, he doesn't think there is a connection between his opening the window and letting the fly escape, and the window that opened in Bergen's office. He doesn't think the first was a good deed, and the second was a reward. Coincidence can be stretched only so far.

But he also knows that the fly could only describe the opening of the window in terms of coincidence. Its mentality is not great enough to permit it to understand the act of a man in freeing it from a trap.

This perturbs Ferguson. He wonders about his own intelligence limit.

The only word he can think of that will describe what happened is fate. It's a good word. It may, or may not, cover the operation of many hidden forces.

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FANTASTIC—BUT TRUE

By ALEX WAMAN

FOR many years it has been the custom in Japan to bury all dead with their heads facing northward. Rite and custom being as important as it is to the Japanese, this practice has never varied. Consequently this position—head pointing northward—is considered by the great mass of Japs to be a very unlucky one.

As a result of this superstition, most Japanese sleep with their heads pointing South, East, or West—but never North. The fear of unwittingly assuming a head-pointing-north position is so strong in countless Japanese that many of them carry compasses with them when they travel, in order to make certain that they are avoiding a northward position when they bunk down in strange territory!

IF THIS Earth of ours got dizzy and wobbled off its axis you couldn't hardly blame it. For it is moving in three directions at the same time. It is rotating upon its own axis and traveling about nine hundred feet per second diminishing from the center toward the poles. In addition to this it is revolving around the sun at speed of about nineteen miles a second. Furthermore it participates in the sun's own forward motion toward the fixed star, Vega, in the constellation of Lyra with a speed of almost twelve miles per second. It does all this simultaneously and also travels with the sun in its rotation on its axis, a job taking about twenty-five days. And some scientists accord to the Earth another motion, namely participation of the Earth in the movement of the whole stellar system on its axis.

IT SHOULD be interesting to those of you who are hardy perennials when it comes to the drinking of tea and/or coffee, that Science has at last stepped into your drinking habits to ascertain that the stimulant prevalent in tea—despite previous opinion to the contrary—is the same as that found in coffee, namely caffeine. Tea manufacturers, however, disguise the similarity between their product and that of the coffee vendors by calling the caffeine in their product *theine,* rather than *caffeine.* But they are both quite the same drug.

Another item noteworthy to you coffee cravers or tea tipplers might be the long sought for scientific explanation for the English ability to brew magnificent tea and monstrous coffee. It has long been a puzzle how the British can be so adapt in making one liquid, and incompetent in brewing a similar one. The reason is scientifically due to the fact that the taste of tea varies with the sort of water in which it is brewed. Chemical differences in various waters will account for tea made in Boston tasting quite different than tea made in Los Angeles.

The English, however, don't run into the same water differences that we do. Their water supply is fairly uniform and lends to the making of especially fine tea. But their water is particularly unsuited to making a decent pot of coffee. It's chemically impossible for them to do so. But for the same reason, much American water is chemically unsuitable to the making of a good brew of tea, while almost all American water makes excellent coffee.

And it is for these reasons, the vagaries of nature and science rather than human capabilities, that the English will always make good tea and rotten coffee, and that America will forever be the despair of tea merchants.

THE bread of life which the Lord sent down to the starving hosts of Israel from the skies was not only a miracle, but a scientific fact.

Today it is gathered by the Arabs and sold to tourists in the Holy Land. It is resinous substance gathered from the fragile twigs of the tamarisk, an evergreen shrub, which is found in many of the valleys of the Mid-Sinai. The sweet, honey-like drops appear like large precipitations of dew in the early morning between June and July.

It is sweet-tasting, but gummy. It is nourishing, but hardly fattening. Recently an attempt has been made to search out the source of this modern manna, but so far they have not succeeded. It is somewhere in the shadow of Mount Sinai, but those venerable hills are not giving up their secrets.

THE scientist who discovered duraluminum at first thought the metal was a failure because it became soft when it was cooled after being removed from the heating oven. Disgusted, the metallurgist tossed the sample alloy on his work bench and went home. The next morning he tossed the sample into the scrap heap only to hear it tinkle in a high note that denoted hardness. A hasty test soon proved the new alloy was as hard as certain forms of steel.

Recently an engineer in one of our aircraft factories remembered this incident and he reasoned that if the sudden cooling of duraluminum, the alloy now used in almost all aircraft, made it soft, why not put duraluminum rivets on dry ice before riveting them into the form of a ship. He tried it and, sure enough, when the rivets became warm after being driven in place, they also became hard.

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READER'S PAGE

DECEMBER ISSUE OKAY

Sirs:

The December issue was okay, yes sir, okay. Although I didn't like the feature novel so much, the others were good except one— "Mr. Eee Conducts a Tour." This was Wilcox at his worst. "The Reformation Of Joseph Reed" was easily the best story. I don't like the new size of the Reader's Page; it's much too small.

Edgar Schlossberg, IV,
1674 Macombs Road,
The Bronx, New York.

We knew Wilcox's story would evoke a storm of comment of an extreme nature. It has either been very much liked, or very much disliked. It's satire at its best, we think.—Ed.

WE STAKE OUR LIVES

Sirs:

Before I begin to fire at will, I'd like to explain that I did not make an entry in the contest to ascertain the Martian's right hand. Therefore my only interest in the matter is to see justice done!

For your sixty-five iron men, you have brought a pig-in-a-poke. For nothing you could have had the Martian toss a Martian half-dollar—and he would have been just as certain!

Mrs. Metcalf has a 50-50 chance of being correct. It is necessary to believe that Martian astronomy uses the North Celestial Pole. If your Martian astronomy uses a South representation, then your Martian will select the wrong lever!

By the same token Mr. Kirkpatrick is also indefinite, thereby wrong.

Mr. Knape's solution comes close, but not close enough. It is true that a current traveling along a wire will produce a magnetic field. But, please tell us which way a magnetic field points? And another thing. Which way does a current run along a wire?

Now, I rather expect to be ignored on this because no man likes to be shown wrong, especially when money is involved. But in all fairness you must admit that I am correct. I believe that you should make some sort of apology to the readers, and not in two-point type at the bottom of an advertisement page!

The judges of this contest should be made to stake their lives on suggestions of this sort, and then we would see just how thin are their answers!

George C. Smith,
15096 Appoline,
Detroit, Mich.

First we'll take Mrs. Metcalf's answer. See page 69 August FANTASTIC ADVENTURE. *Colmun 2, line 12: Quote: "We've set the robot controls so that it (the ship) should land precisely where the Martian is now—thanks to the space navigational data he passed on to us."*

Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933, of Fantastic Adventures, published monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1941. State of Illinois, County of Cook, ss. Before me, a notary public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared A. T. Pullen, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the business manager of Fantastic Adventures and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, W. B. Ziff, 608 S. Dearborn Street, Chicago, Ill.; Editor, B. G. Davis, 608 S. Dearborn Street, Chicago, Ill.; Managing Editor, R. A. Palmer, 608 S. Dearborn Street, Chicago, Ill.; Business Manager, A. T. Pullen, 608 S. Dearborn Street, Chicago, Ill. 2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.) Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, 608 S. Dearborn Street, Chicago, Ill.; W. B. Ziff Co., 608 S. Dearborn Street, Chicago, Ill.; W. B. Ziff, 608 S. Dearborn Street, Chicago, Ill.; A. Ziff, 608 S. Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill.; B. G. Davis, 608 S. Dearborn Street, Chicago, Ill.; S. Davis, 608 S. Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) None. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, *the name of the person or corporation for* whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; *and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other* person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. 5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the twelve months preceding *the date shown above* is..... *(This information is required from daily publications only.)* A. T. Pullen, Business Manager. (Signature of business manager.)
Sworn to and subscribed before me this 3rd day of October, 1941.
[Seal.] M. Gnass, Notary Public. (My commission expires February 26, 1944.)

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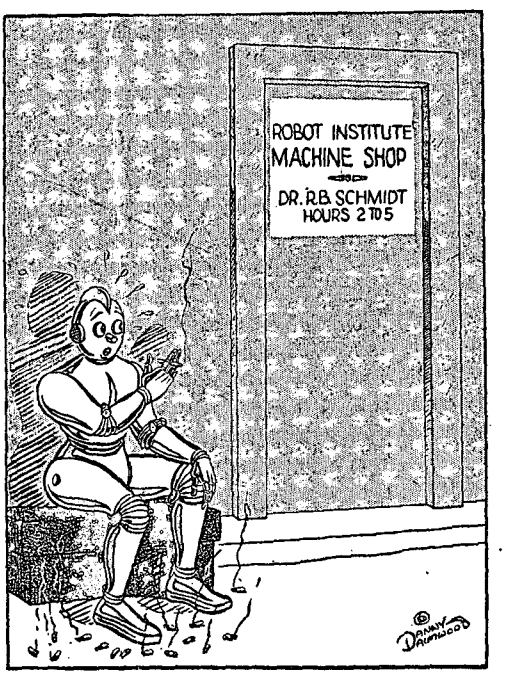
According to that, Mr. Smith, the Martian definitely does use our own North Celestial Polar concept. It says so in the story. Therefore Mrs. Metcalf was considerably more observing than her competitors for the prize, and deserves to win it because, in addition, she is absolutely correct, as they say on a certain radio program!

Now, Mr. Kirkpatrick. If he had ignored the fact that Martians, from the text of the story, conceive of things as we do, in regard to such matters, then his would be a guess. But we must assume that he did read the story, as Mrs. Metcalf did, and based his assumption on the known facts presented to him.

As for the last solution, the electrical, magnetic one, every time we hooked up a motor to a battery, the current ran from the battery to the motor. We know this, because we tried a voltmeter on the motor before we connected it to the battery, and it registered nothing. When we tried the same on the battery, we had perforce to believe that there was current in it, and by means of a little deduction, we decided that the current would run from the battery to the motor. At least, we hoped so, because the motor was a plaything of ours, and we wanted to play with it, and that wouldn't be fun if it didn't run, would it?

Also, we seem to remember once seeing some little steel filings travel very markedly in a right direction above a bar in which a current (by the same token as our battery and motor experiment above) was traveling away from us. We wonder why they did that? Perhaps the Martian, being quite scientific, would have observed the same phenomenon, and would thus know which was right.



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All in all, an editor's life is so little to stake. He stakes it every time he runs a story that is a little different. Some readers don't like it, so they chop off his head. You should see the scars! But we don't mind, because we have an elixir, given us by Odin himself, which glues the head back on, and no fooling.—Ed.

HE LIKES US

Sirs:

I like you. I don't think your magazines are half as bad as some would like to think. I liked "Death Plays A Game." I liked "Mr. Eee Conducts A Tour." I didn't enjoy so much "The Reformation Of Joseph Reed." I thought the last three stories were all right. Yes, I think you and your magazine and your stories are all right.

BUT: (*slashed out by the editor, because he found the errors in our contest too. See foregoing letter Mr. . . .)*

Phillip Schumann,
2767 N. 41st Street,
Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Thanks for your kind words, Phil. We like you too!—Ed.

A FEW COMMENTS

Sirs:

Now to indulge in a few comments on FA in general.

1. All the praise possible to McCauley. He's the best ever.

2. Eulogies too, for the "Little People" stories (E. Binder).

3. To shift the tune somewhat, please hand J. Allen St. John a gross of brickbats and then shoot him.

4. Let's have something by Cummings or Burroughs in every issue, or at least, alternately.

5. I echo the "Rabbit" of last month's letters—less drapery on the correct places.

6. Jay Jackson, where'd my gas mask go?

All kidding aside, except for a few brickbats, yours is a swell magazine and the good points outweigh the bad by about 100 to 1/10.

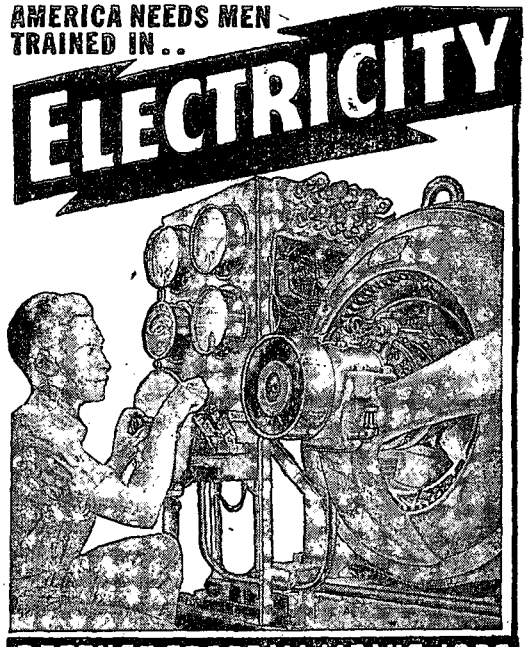
Fred Kuehndorf,
15-B Sheldon Court,
Ithaca, N. Y.

This issue has something you'll like. The cover has as its feature, a Mac Girl. You won't like the dress, we guess, but she's gotta wear something sometime, doesn't she? The odd thing about this cover, though, isn't the Mac Girl with clothes on; it's the fact that it's a Fuqua cover, except for the Mac Girl. When we saw Fuqua's remarkable concept of the "Doorway To Hell," we instantly saw what a Mac Girl would do to it, and there you are!—Ed.

FANTASY-SCIENCE

Sirs:

Just to inject a little thought into fantasy fiction, I'll ask us all, just what is the definition of fantasy? I often think of it as science fiction



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wherein the science is left unexplained—what do you say?

The story line-up in the December issue was really excellent, with the exception of one misfit—"People Of The Pyramid"—which somehow struck me as having too much science in it. It was a good story, though.

Here's how I rate the other five stories: The Reformation Of Joseph Reed—very good. Death Plays A Game—also good, but didn't strike me as being as good as Williams' yarn. Rewbarb's Remarkable Radio—remarkable! Beauty And The Beasties—fairly good. Mr. Eee Conducts A Tour—where'd he get that silly name?

Ruth is doing well on the covers, but warn him against the use of his rather sickly greens.

Lynn H. Benham,
Crothersville, Indiana.

Your definition is fairly good, but doesn't include pure fantasy, or imagination, other than science-fantasy.—Ed.

BURROUGHS IS THE NUTS!

Sirs:

I just finished reading your FA. It was the nuts. Anybody who says Burroughs is bad must be nuts. He's the best writer any SF mag has. You're lucky to have him as a writer for you.

Naturally Burroughs in my mind is the best; leads with flying colors. Schachner has second place. McGivern is third, I guess. That was a wonderful plot, but he killed it. Wilcox was probably better than McGivern and Farnsworth was fifth and Swain was last.

Swain had a swell idea, but I've read a story somewhere, sometime, and they both smell the same. How about more Burroughs and some more stories by Eando Binder? Wilcox is usually pretty good, McGivern is usually good. Cabot is swell, how about more? AS and FA are the best mags put out. I'd choose one of them first.

Robert Waymouth,
Mt. Herman School,
Mt. Herman, Mass.

Burroughs will be back next month with the final "Carson of Venus" yarn, and the best. Don't miss it. Cabot and Binder will both return. In fact, Cabot is in this issue.—Ed.

MORE ABOUT BURROUGHS

Sirs:

In a previous letter I criticized Edgar Rice Burroughs as a cheap adventure story writer and not a science fiction writer. Your reply to my letter and the letters of other anti-Burroughs readers is always: "This is not a science fiction magazine, as you can plainly see by its name FANTASTIC ADVENTURES and we do not claim that the stories are science fiction—they are fantastic adventures."

Well, I must concede that point. They are fantastic adventures, and they are not out of place in FA. —But can you tell me why the exact same type of stories by Burroughs can

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appear in *Amazing Stories*, a science fiction magazine?

But all faults considered, (even Burroughs) a team of horses couldn't keep me from the magazine stand when a new issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES or *Amazing Stories* arrives. I know that while I don't like Burroughs the majority of the readers do, so I am not kicking. I am just voicing my humble opinion of him. Just keep on turning out stories as good as in the past and my twenty cents will continue to buy me a million dollars of entertainment when I buy your magazines. Of course there is room for improvement, but I am still completely satisfied. How about another contest?

Wilfred C. Fagot,
U. S. Maritime Service,
Gallups Island,
Boston, Mass.

In a way, fantasy stories based on other planets could be called science fiction, and therefore would fit in Amazing Stories, but we want to try to keep science stories out of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, *simply because we want to make that magazine different. If we ran the same stories in both of them, we might just as well combine them and put out a book 290 pages thick and simply call it Amazing-Fantastic Stories. But is all this argument about Burroughs, who really is an exception to the rule, of any point? Most of our readers like him, as you admit, and you like everything else we run. It seems to us we have you where we want you—satisfied.*—Ed.

TWO WELCOME EXCEPTIONS

Sirs:

I started reading your magazine because of the Edgar Rice Burroughs stories. He isn't so good as he used to be, but he still is far ahead of any of the other contributors to your magazine. In a Burroughs story the fantastic seems real, but the rest of your writers rush through space with a lot of monsters and machinery that the reader forgets as soon as the story is finished. "The Liquid Man" and "Secret Of The Stone Doll" were two welcome exceptions.

John A. Granger,
21 Church Street,
Passumpsic, Vermont.

There you might have the secret of why Burroughs is so well liked. He has a realism and convincingness that makes the story seem very credible. There is no doubt in the reader's mind of the possibility of the existence of the monster Burroughs describes. It's a knack of the old master.

Well, that's all for this month.—Ed.

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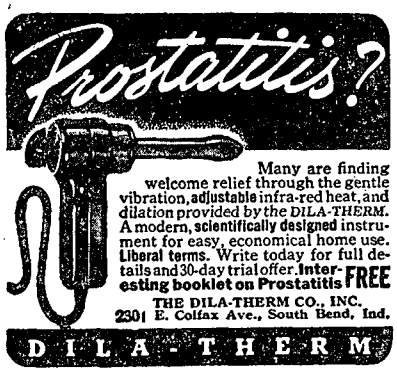

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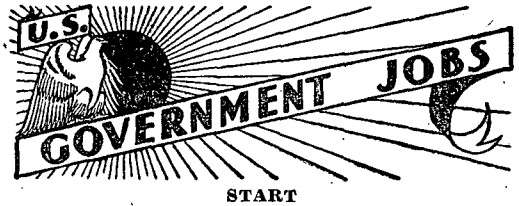

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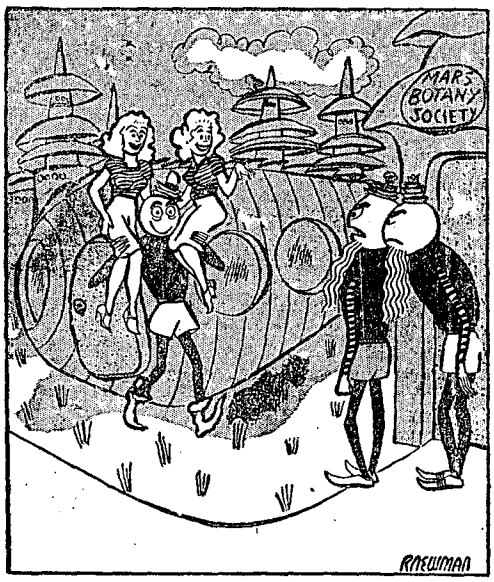

"Well, Toorku, we hope you have brought back from Earth something besides biological specimens."

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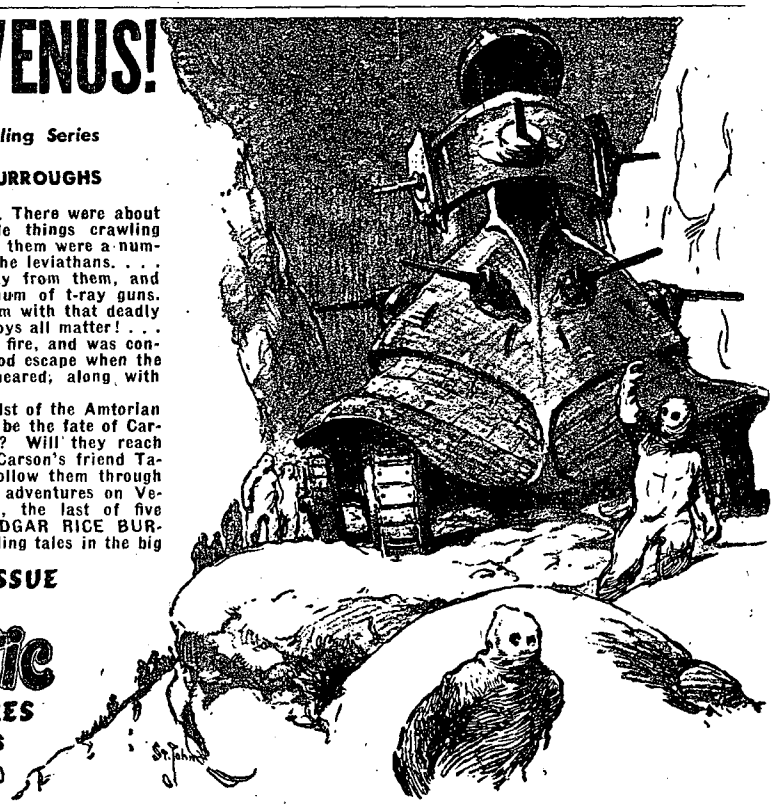

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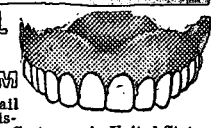

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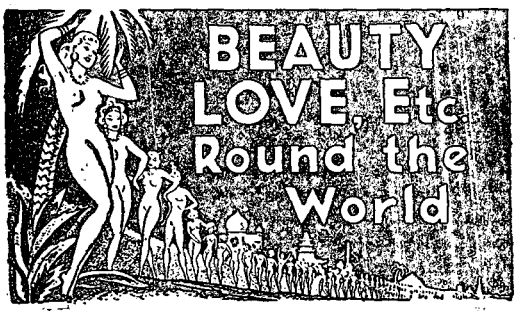

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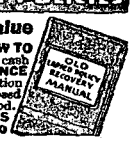

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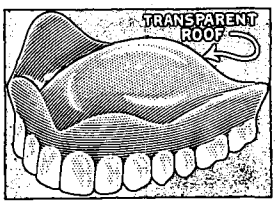

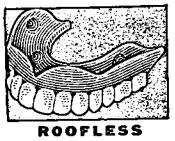

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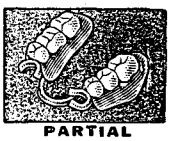

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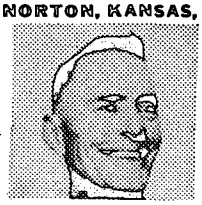

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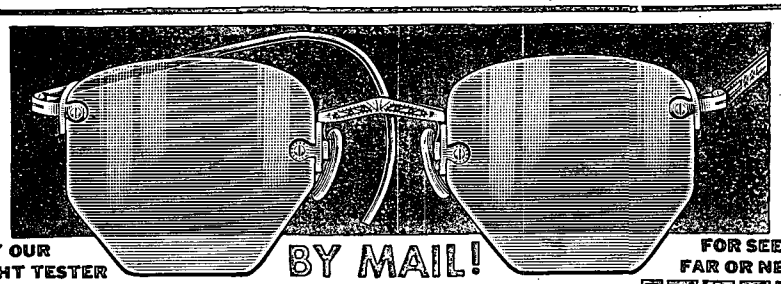

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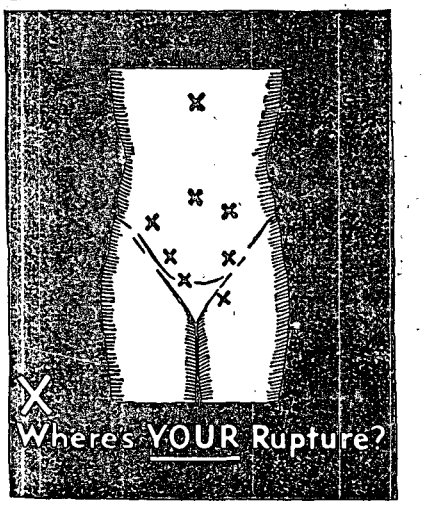

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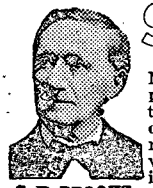

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